ILKA

THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN

PAISLEY SCHOOL PRIZE FUND.

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"Receive your Bride from the Hands of your King!"

ILKA

THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN

And Other Stories

By S. G.

Author of "All's Well that Ends Well,"
"Dickie Winton,"

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ILKA:

THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN.

AFTER many years of fighting there was a truce between the Hungarians and the wild heathen tribes to the south of the Szava, or river Save ; and now at length King Salamon's brave knights found leisure to think of gentler subjects than war, and to talk of other matters than swords and lances.

Certainly it was of neither one nor the other that Bors Gyula,* the bravest of the brave, had been speaking this evening, as he turned his horse's head homeward. There was a bright smile on his face, and ever and anon he looked back to wave another farewell to the maiden who was watching his departure. He hoped soon to come and claim her as his bride ; for the marriage-day was fixed, and he would no more return to a desolate home.

Yet still he had lingered, lover-like, till the last

* Julius.

moment; and still, though the last *légy boldog* (farewell) had been spoken, and he had mounted his horse, he could not make up his mind to set off. The horse, however, was more impatient than his master, and at length insisted on starting. And now the two were trotting away, Gyula, as we have said, still looking back and murmuring many an *Isten véled* (God be with you), as the form of his betrothed became more and more indistinct in the darkness. His mind was full of happy thoughts, and little he guessed how and when he and his bride Ilka * were destined to meet again.

* * * *

In a room in the grim fortress of Belgrade stood a young Greek officer, talking to and apparently trying to soothe a girl, whose vehement gestures and indignant exclamations seemed to show that this would be no easy task. Belgrade was at this time garrisoned by Greeks. There were Greeks in the town, Greek soldiers in the fortress; but the tall, graceful girl to whom Alexis was talking, with her flashing eyes, dark braided tresses, and picturesque dress, was evidently no Greek.

"So your general is going to try what hard measures will do?" she was saying. "It is no more than I expected, for I have long seen through him. But never mind; he may shut me up in his deepest

* Ilka = Helena.

dungeon, but he can't make me false to myself. You are grieved for me. Nay, don't trouble yourself. It isn't worth while; danger does but prove one's courage."

The young Greek looked at her sorrowfully yet admiringly as he answered, "If I could but help you, even at the sacrifice of my life! but it is in vain. My position is difficult. Forgive me for having been obliged to bring you this sad news; but what can I do? You know I am the general's adopted son. Gratitude binds me to him, for indeed he has been good to me; he has done everything for me—but then—"

"Well, what is the matter?" asked the maiden more gently, as she noted the troubled look on her companion's face.

"If you knew how often I have entreated the Lord of heaven to point out the way—to show me how to set you free!"

"Thanks, Alexis, for your good-will and sympathy; but indeed I do not wish to be free, if it can only be at the cost of a crime on your part. No! Niketas has been good to you; you must be faithful to him."

"But how can I bear to see you in prison, perhaps in chains?"

"Never mind! Whatever happens, I know there is One who feels for me; and besides, I hope—I am

sure—sooner or later my country will rise and free me from Niketas; and then, my friend, I shall soon forget all I have suffered, or even look back on it with joy, that I was allowed thus to prove my fidelity."

"Well," said Alexis meditatively, "peculiar fates are ordered by Heaven, they say. You may not be long in prison; and, after all, compared with me you are happy, for you have still the future, whereas a dark cloud covers the fair morning of my life."

The young Greek looked very melancholy; and taken up as she was with her own sad trials, Ilka could not help noticing it and inquiring the cause.

She could not make much out of his answer. "The hopes and the fairy dreams of his youth were gone, and he had found out that the heroic deeds of a soldier's life, which once had been all in all to him, were no longer enough to satisfy his heart;" but he broke off abruptly, saying, "Never mind, Ilka, don't heed me; I am happy enough!"

But the expression of his face belied his words; and Ilka, who during the two years of her captivity had come to look upon Alexis in the light of a brother, insisted on knowing the real cause of his grief.

It came at last very simply and humbly. It was only that he loved the captive girl, and felt that his love was not, never could be, returned, though he knew nothing of her previous history. He had

looked up to and admired her strong, brave spirit, but he had always felt her to be far beyond his reach. He had never hoped to win her. He would never have spoken but for her questions.

"Now you know my sorrow," he added gently; "but do not heed it—do not let it distress you. Forgive me, for I could not be with you and not love you. I cannot even now cease to love you; only, don't let it trouble you. Think of my life as of a flower which you have unconsciously trodden underfoot."

"My good Alexis!" exclaimed Ilka, half amused, "don't talk in this way. You are mistaken—you are indeed! You are sorry for me, I know, and so you fancy you are in love with me; but I assure you love is a very different matter." And then, as Alexis shook his head and murmured something in deprecation, she added, "I shall love you always, as the best of my brothers, Alexis—always till death."

"Death!" mused the young Greek—"till death! Nay; death destroys only the human, earthly heart, not the spirit. There, in the home of light—"

But he was not allowed to finish his sentence; for Ilka, wishing to change the current of his thoughts, began to tell him something of her own history. He was the only Greek in whom she had any confidence—the only one who had shown her kindness and sympathy; and it was a relief to speak

of the past to sympathizing ears, even though the doing so did but more sadly sharpen the contrast between past and present. It was not a long story, and indeed was but too common a one in those tempestuous ages, when the border lands were seldom safe from the raids of their neighbours. The pagan bands had suddenly and treacherously fallen upon the peaceful Magyar homes in time of truce, had burned, plundered, and destroyed all they could lay their hands on, and had then recrossed the Szava, bearing with them an immense booty and many captives. Among these latter was Ilka, who had been seized and carried off on the eve of her marriage, and subsequently sold to Niketas, governor of Belgrade, or Nándorfejérvár, as she herself called it. "But," added she, "I trust my country and my good king, and I feel sure that I shall be set free before long."

There was a shade of perplexity on the Greek's brow as he listened to her brave, confident words, in which there was not the slightest trace of self-pity or wavering resolution. For a few moments he preserved an uneasy silence, as if debating with himself as to the expediency of communicating some important intelligence. As usual, his generosity overpowered any scruples he might have had as to the governor's wishes on the subject, and he exclaimed,—

"Well, Ilka, I can conceal it no longer. You have your wish: the Magyar troops are below Belgrade."

"Ha, Alexis! what good angel speaks in you?" cried Ilka, springing up with all the wild excitability of her race, and looking as though her dark, flashing eyes must of themselves suffice to gather from him at a glance all he knew, without the intervention of the common medium of speech. "Now I understand! now I see! Niketas is afraid—he is afraid of the Magyar arms! that is why he has shut me up in this dungeon; for he knows that if I were but above ground, he could not keep me from my friends. Speak! speak, Alexis! say, what have you heard about the Magyars?"

"You are asking a great deal; for what I know of the Magyars is not to our honour, and you can hardly expect me to be the herald of my countrymen's disgrace."

"One may honour virtue even in a foreigner," responded Ilka warmly: "a generous-hearted man is always ready to acknowledge what is good without waiting to consider who did it; if it is good in itself, it must be good even though your enemy did it. Come, now, tell me quick; how does the Magyar fight? who are in the camp? O make haste! tell me what has happened."

"Well, then, you must know that bands of rob-

bers from Pécs have several times crossed the Szava and invaded your country, under the protection, and indeed with the connivance, of Niketas."

"Ah! then I have him to thank for my captivity. Well, go on."

"After great bloodshed, rapine, and devastation, they have each time safely recrossed the Szava, and put themselves under the protection of the Greeks. King Salamon of course heard of it, and wishing to take vengeance on the Greeks for their broken faith, and also to obtain some satisfaction for his plundered people, called his heroes together, and pitched his camp near Zalánk."

Ilka listened with eager eyes and ears while Alexis went on to tell all he knew. King Salamon (1063–75) was accompanied, it seemed, by Dukes Géza and László, the noble sons of Béla I., his father's brother; László, the beloved of Heaven, whose strong arm had lately stained the scattered mountains of Kérles with Kuman* blood, and gained a glorious victory over the enemy.

"But," he continued carelessly, and little guessing the effect his words would have upon the captive maiden, "the most distinguished of all the nobles is one whom they call Bors Gyula. His sword flashes like lightning upon the foe, and death is his brother-

* The Kumans were a wild tribe allied to the Magyars, but still heathen.

at-arms, for he needs but to look and brave men fall to the ground."

"Ha!" cried Ilka joyfully; "Gyula is there! Now, Alexis—now I am free, and you Greeks are the prisoners."

"I don't understand—"

"When once you have seen him you will understand. But he is terrible only on the battle-field; away from it he is gentle, and—ah, Gyula, Gyula!" she suddenly broke off, "I shall see you, and you will take me out of the dungeon, back to the dear, dear home!" Then, as Alexis looked somewhat astonished and bewildered by her words, she told him that Bors Gyula was her own true knight, adding kindly, "But you must be his friend too, Alexis; he will love you for your care of me. But oh, speak, and tell me some more. What is going on?"

"Niketas wanted to spare Belgrade, so he called Kázár, Prince of Fünfkirchen, to his assistance; but he told him only of the booty to be gained, and not of the danger to be incurred; so Kázár came with his army, and laid waste the districts of Bács and Soprony with fire and sword. They received him like heroes, and the contest was long and doubtful; but at length Duke László and Bors Gyula cut through Kázár's army, divided the lines, and obtained so complete a victory that even the prince himself barely managed to escape with a few followers.

We could see your Magyar army from the walls, and you can imagine the governor's rage when he saw the prisoners and an enormous booty presented to the king. But I ought not to tell you all this; Niketas—"

"It is beautiful, glad news! O Alexis, how can I ever thank you for your kindness! When the Magyars have taken Nándor, and there are misery and death everywhere, then—"

"Then," interrupted Alexis, "let me die with the others."

"No, Alexis, you shall live; and live a life full of noble, heroic deeds."

Alexis made a deprecating movement; but he had no time to argue further, for just then came a messenger, saying that the governor had asked for him several times, and desired his presence.

"I will follow you immediately." Then, as the man withdrew, he turned to Ilka and renewed his former persuasions and entreaties. "Ilka, don't provoke his anger. Come with me, and see him, as he wishes. I will protect you; I will answer for your life with my own blood. Only don't rouse him, for when once he is excited his anger knows no bounds."

"Never mind," answered Ilka, proudly and confidently; "Gyula is close by, and I am his, and I am free. No, no: let Niketas storm and rage as he

will, Ilka has a Magyar heart which has never yet known fear."

Sorrowfully Alexis quitted the high-spirited captive; and now while Ilka is looking round at the damp bare walls of her dungeon, scarcely noting either their dampness or bareness in her delight at the news she has heard, let us take a glance at the Magyar camp, and see how it fares with Ilka's brave knight, and whether he has become reconciled to the loss of his bride, who had been so suddenly and mysteriously taken from him on the eve of their marriage.

* * * *

"We shall surely snatch Nándorfejérvár from the enemy ere long," the king was observing to his cousin, Duke Géza. "What with László's brave arm and our heroic troops, I have no fear. Dukas, the emperor, has broken the peace by letting his pagan swarms loose upon us, and he deserves no mercy; and as for Niketas, who has been mean enough to pretend to be on terms of neighbourly friendship with us, let him now reap the reward he has sought. The pagan hosts shall no longer plunder Hunnia, carrying away her free sons and daughters in chains to a foreign land."

"You may safely rely on your brave Magyars," responded Duke Géza; "they will soon bring the barbarians to terms. And now that we may once

more embrace one another as brothers,* I hope and believe that no enemy will ever again cross the Hungarian frontier unpunished."

"Still," resumed the king, "Nándor is strong, and I cannot but grieve over the Magyar blood which must flow ere the siege be ended.—Therefore, brave Menyhárt," he added, turning to one of the nobles who stood near, "do you now go up to the fortress, and offer Niketas terms for its surrender. He and his whole garrison shall have free leave to depart unharmed if he gives me up the keys of the place; but if he will not yield to my demand, then, my friends, Nándor shall no longer be a refuge for robbers; we will take it by storm."

"My lord king, you shall have tidings within an hour."

"And," added Géza, "I will go with you myself; so that, should Niketas refuse compliance with the king's gracious and friendly proposal, we may begin the attack at once, before he has had time to arrange his plans and man the walls."

"You are right: a sudden attack is half the battle," said the king.

"Yes," continued Géza; "and now that we have been waiting here two months, it is high time to

* There were frequent jealousies and disputes between King Salamon and his cousins; but just now they were on good terms, as the king was in need of their assistance.

set to work before the enemy loses his fear of us. I will leave the camp at midnight with my own division; and at daybreak to-morrow my brother László and I will storm Nándor from the Danube, while you remain with the rest of the army near the Szava."

"Honoured king," interposed Menyhárt, "my advice is that we wait for Bors Gyula. With him come the knights of Veszprém and Zala, all excellent warriors and accustomed to war. Moreover, I long to see Gyula himself here, for his heroism has great influence with the army, and he shines like a star of victory in the midst of battle."

"There is a rumour," said Géza again, "that the garrison of Nándor is composed of Bulgarians as well as of Greeks, and that these two are not on the best of terms. This may be of the greatest advantage to us."

"I put my whole trust in the Magyar," returned the king emphatically; "for love to his country steels his heart. No more of this! we will storm the fortress; and do you, Géza my brother, tell László all. Bear him my royal greeting, and hearty thanks for his heroic deeds. Beg him to continue ever the shield of Hungary and the terror of the enemy. Ha! what do I see? Gyula himself!"

As the king spoke, up rode a band of men, triumphantly waving a banner captured from the

enemy. Their leader, the renowned Bors Gyula, dismounted and saluted the king and the royal duke as he respectfully, yet with a certain exultation in his look, laid the banner at the feet of the former, saying,—

"Hail, noble king! and you, fair duke! Behold the proof of my victory, and take it as a pledge that the noble Magyar king shall in like manner tread underfoot all his enemies."

"Son of laurel wreaths, born only to conquer, receive my thanks. But you are wounded!"

"It is nothing, only a scratch where a spear grazed my forehead, and a few old scars," answered Gyula lightly; and then, in answer to an inquiry from the king, he proceeded to give an account of the battle in which he had been engaged.

"Part of Kázár's defeated army was lurking among the mountains, hoping to be able to fall on us, and so make their way to Niketas. They were some four thousand strong, while I had but two thousand men. However, I fell in with their advanced guard, and found them encamped upon a beautiful plain. They attacked us with great confidence, and bravely they fought; but Magyar heroism was again victorious. Eight hundred of them lie on the field of battle, and twelve hundred prisoners I have brought with me to the camp, that the Greek general and Nándorvár may see what they

have to expect. A few of our men fell, and died a glorious death for their country."

"Their memory will ever live in the grateful heart of their king and country," said Salamon with emotion. Then taking his own lance, he presented it to Gyula, saying, "Keep this as a memorial of your own brave deed and of your king's gratitude."

"And I," said the generous-hearted duke, "would offer gold did I not know that its paltry glitter has no charm for such as you. Take my hand as a pledge of the friendship which I trust shall always be between us."

Had Ilka seen her lover's face just then she would have discovered no shadow of sorrow upon it, nothing to make her think he mourned her absence very deeply. His handsome face was beaming with pleasure at the praises of the king, and with an ardent desire to do yet more to deserve them. His whole soul was absorbed in martial deeds, and there was small trace of the gentler spirit which his captive bride had known and loved. Yet even she at that moment might have looked on him with pride, and without any painful feeling of jealousy; for was she not a Magyar girl, and was not Hunnia as dear to her as to him? Little love or respect would she have had for her knight, had she fancied that any thought of her could dim his enthusiasm in the country's cause.

But now the council is broken up, the nobles disperse, and Menyhárt proceeds to bear the king's message to the Greek governor of Belgrade.

Niketas received him rudely; and, in a manner which showed his own uneasy conscience, endeavoured to throw upon the Hungarians the blame of breaking the peace with the Byzantine emperor. Menyhárt, however, soon showed him that his double-dealing was known, and cutting short his excuses, bade him remember that he had little time left him in which to decide, and that he had better make up his mind at once either to surrender Belgrade or come to the Magyar camp and there remain as a hostage until the emperor should send to offer King Salamon full satisfaction. Both proposals Niketas indignantly rejected, for his recent acts were not known to the emperor, who had concluded a peace with the Hungarians; and the governor had little to hope from him when his evil deeds should be brought to light.

He therefore merely replied that while the walls of Belgrade were standing he should defend it to the last. In vain Menyhárt bade him look from the window, whence he could see long lines of prisoners crossing the Szava, and might learn that any hopes of receiving succour were vain, as the allies who had so faithfully divided the booty with him had already received their reward. In vain he

urged that useless bloodshed was no true heroism, and that he ought to spare his people. Niketas was doggedly determined to fight to the bitter end; and Menyhárt left the governor's presence, bearing a message of defiance to his king.

Left alone, the governor's reflections were not of the pleasantest kind. He told himself that he had still soldiers enough, and that he could but come to an accommodation with the Hungarians when all else had failed. But then if Belgrade fell into their hands, what had he to expect? There was no hope of succour from his own nation; there was no mercy to look for, no excuse for his double-dealing; all the fury of the Hungarians would fall upon himself, and even if he escaped with his life, how could he bear the scorn of a victorious enemy? No, no! death were far preferable. He would die, sword in hand; yet a shudder came over him as he resolved to die—he was afraid of death.

"No, not afraid of death!" he muttered. "Ilka, Ilka! it is you! love for you lures me back to the world, and makes life dear to me. No! I will not die yet; my miserable life shall have one drop of happiness, and Ilka shall—Ho, there! what is the matter?"

"My lord general," said a soldier, entering in great hurry and alarm, "there is a great movement among the enemy; they are all encamped beneath

the fortress, and seem preparing to storm, for we can plainly distinguish the battering-rams and the ladders."

"Let them come," answered the governor indifferently. "We are men as well as they, and know how to fight too. Go! let the archers and slingers place themselves upon the outmost bastion and receive the enemy. As for the Bulgarians, they may wait my orders in the great square."

"General," answered the man unwillingly, "the Bulgarians are mutinous. They want to surrender the fortress, and are so terrified at the sight of the enemy that they are not inclined to fight."

"What! and you did not cut them to pieces? They shall not go unpunished. Go! order every Greek, in my name, to be in readiness. I will deal with the Bulgarians myself, and I shall find means to make them obedient."

The soldier departed to execute his orders; and Alexis, who had just quitted Ilka's dungeon after the interview we have described, came to seek the governor in obedience to his summons.

"Well, what a time I have been waiting for you!" began Niketas impatiently. "Make haste now, and tell me about Ilka; speak, for I have pressing business on hand. How does she like her new abode?"

"It is no longer new," answered Alexis sadly.

"But she does not know what fear is, and she makes not the smallest complaint or lamentation. Bold and brave, she plays with her chains, and quietly waits for some change in her fortunes. Niketas, I confess I cannot give you much hope; you will never win her heart."

"No? we shall see! It's nothing but obstinacy, and I will find some way of bringing her to reason."

"Ilka has already loved, and first love is strong. Let her go back to her people. Now is the best opportunity, and you will win every Magyar heart."

"Enough! enough! I am not going to do it; and if you desire to retain the good-will of Niketas, never mention such an idea again. For this once I will overlook your words; and as for Ilka, if she will not make me happy, let her perish unseen in the dungeon of Belgrade. Then if the Magyars do enter the fortress, which is not at all probable, my death will avail her nothing."

So saying, Niketas left the room to go and see after his defences; and Alexis remained, turning over in his mind every conceivable means by which he might save the captive maiden from the terrible fate which threatened.

"The governor is more determined than ever," he mused; "and if the Magyars are victorious, O Ilka, Ilka, no one will guess where you are! your own countrymen will be unconsciously treading

upon your living grave, and you will die a terrible death!"

The dreadful picture made him shudder, and he paced up and down the room, trying to banish it from his mind.

"I am innocent, yet I am the only one who can help her, and the governor trusts me; it seems as though I must either betray him or leave her to her fate. No, Niketas; I will not betray you—you who took me when I was a poor orphan, and brought me up as your own son. No—but, O Ilka, Ilka, what shall I do! how shall I save you?"

Again he was lost in deep and anxious thought; and hardly knowing what he was about, he walked to the window, from which he could see the Magyar tents whitening all the valley below, and now gilded by the last rays of the setting sun. There he stood gazing at the beautiful landscape before him; and as he gazed, the thought came to his mind that down there in the valley, among those white tents, was the happy man whom Ilka loved, the brave man who was a guiding star to his nation. Ha, what a thought!—could he? yes, he could, and he would: he would hazard his life to save her who had called him "brother;" he would go to the Magyar camp, find Gyula, and tell him of the danger of his bride.

* * * *

It was late in the evening. The Magyar soldiers were lying by their camp fires, and the moon was shining brightly down on the gleaming white tents.

Gyula and his friend Menyhárt had not yet betaken themselves to repose, but were standing in front of their tents talking, though not, as it would seem, about the day's work in prospect. Gyula wore no longer the gay, triumphant air of a few short hours ago. He looked weary and worn, and had evidently been indulging in some very melancholy observation; for Menyhárt was taking him to task, and reminding him that he certainly had no cause to complain of fortune: for had not his lot been peculiarly favoured? had he not had opportunities of distinguishing himself such as fell to the share of few? And Gyula allowed that it was all true, and that glory and honour were still precious to him, but they had lost their zest; for though much had been left to him, the best and dearest had been snatched away.

"Insatiable man!" cried Menyhárt, "what more can you want, when you have attained the highest point of fortune? The nation knows you, the king loves you, the army honours you, and still you nurse these gloomy thoughts!"

"It is true," sighed Gyula. "I have trodden the slippery path of glory successfully, and the light of victory shines round my head; but still—

O my friend, there is something concealed among the flowers of the wreath, something which takes from its brightness and is slowly withering it away. Soon it will fade altogether if there is no hand to water it with the lost dew of life."

"Still the old sorrow, Gyula. Look up! are there not many fair maidens in Magyarország? and you have but to choose among them, for love favours the brave."

"Menyhárt, that is all over for me. I have loved but once, and I can never love again. I have never met but one whose heart beat in perfect unison with mine, and where she now is I know not. Ah, Ilka, Ilka! in what corner of the earth art thou sleeping this night? perhaps among terrible pagans; and I am alone upon earth, with nothing to make life dear to me—no one to care for me!"

"What foolish dreams! You a hero, and harbour such miseries in your breast!"

"It may be wrong, it may be weak," returned Gyula; "but I must confess this is my favourite hour—it recalls my past happiness. I could still love, fight, and die for my loved one; she is still my one only idol."

"Love away then, my friend, if it makes you happy to have such shadowy fancies," said Menyhárt, despairing of inducing his friend to take a more cheerful view of his position; "only forgive me for

not understanding you, for I am truly sorry for you; but, you see, I have grown up amid scenes of war, and know nothing but how to handle weapons. I never knew any more tender feeling. To-morrow, then, we storm Nándor at daybreak! it will be tough work. I am going to prepare for it by getting a little sleep. Look how beautifully the moonlight shines on the tower of the fortress."

"Would it were day! there is no room for sorrow amid the din of battle, the clatter of arms, and the stamping of horses."

"How many a Magyar who is now dreaming happily will to-morrow sleep his last sleep!"

"If I die for my country, it is all I desire. My name will shine in the book of history; I shall not be forgotten!"

"No; even future ages will remember our heroic deeds, our glorious deaths, which may serve to encourage the Magyars of later times. Ha, Gyula my friend," exclaimed the enthusiastic Menyhárt, grasping his companion's hand, "what is life compared with so glorious a death!"

"Good-night, Menyhárt; sleep well!"

"Yes, till the trumpet sounds in my ears," said Menyhárt joyfully; and then he disappeared within his tent, while Gyula looked after him with a feeling half of envy for his light-hearted gaiety.

He looked up at the bright heavens, then at the

grim fortress; and at last, thinking that perhaps he might be able to sleep better in the open air, spread his panther-skin on the ground, took off his cuirass and put it under his head for a pillow, and then lay down to try to sleep. Little did he guess how near Ilka was to him as he murmured her name in his dreams.

An hour or two later Alexis was in the Hungarian camp, disguised in a long white cloak, and asking to be directed to Bors Gyula's tent. His mind was full of doubts and fears as he stealthily made his way in the direction pointed out, until he came to the place where Gyula was sleeping. Some strange instinct warned him that this was the man he sought, and going up to him he tried to awake him.

Gyula turned sleepily over, asking if the battle had begun; and when he understood the object of Alexis' search, he was rather bewildered, and disposed to think there was some mistake. Alexis was so effectually disguised in the Hungarian cloak that he was not recognized for a Greek; and in the first ecstasy at having discovered Ilka's knight, his words were so incoherent that Gyula might fairly be bewildered. His bewilderment was hardly lessened when, as he asked the stranger who he was and what he wanted, Alexis suddenly threw off the cloak and announced himself to be a Greek. He was inclined at first to think some treachery was in-

tended, till he remembered that as the stranger had found him asleep and unarmed, and had not taken his life, he could hardly have any ill designs against him. Then with a sudden revulsion of feeling, being convinced that the stranger was no common-minded foe, he warmly welcomed him; and Alexis, whose every instant in the Hungarian camp was precious, since he was afraid, if long away, his absence from Belgrade would be discovered, at once began his story. He told Gyula, but without mentioning names, that a Hungarian maiden was a prisoner in Belgrade, that her life was in great danger,—adding that as long as the Greeks held the fortress, he would protect her; but if the Hungarians were successful, he placed her fate in Gyula's hands. "Search every prison, every dungeon, and you will surely find her; but don't ask me to tell you who is keeping her prisoner, as that I am bound by oath not to divulge."

"Strange!" muttered Gyula; "and what have I to do with it?"

"You are the only one who can help us; and besides, it concerns you very deeply. She is a noble creature—my sister—my darling!"

"Your sister *and* your darling? be more explicit, boy!"

"She is in the power of a man who is so madly in love with her, that sooner than not win her he

will destroy both himself and her. Providence willed that I should stand between them, and I have guarded her carefully; but soon my power will be at an end, and then you must set her free; for know, Gyula, that this noble maiden is Ilka, your own bride!"

"Ha, what! No, no! speak, boy!"

"I say it is Ilka," repeated Alexis—"Ilka, your betrothed, who was brought to Belgrade by the pagans some time ago."

But Gyula was still doubtful, and moreover the young Greek's manifest interest in the captive maiden made him suspicious.

"She is your sister, you say, or do you mean your lady-love?" he inquired distrustfully.

"She has been under my care for two summers," answered Alexis. "I have seen her every day, and every day she seemed to me fairer. Who could help loving her? But—" and then in few words he told Gyula all that Ilka had told him of her history.

Gyula was but too glad to allow himself to be convinced at last; and then Alexis turned to go. "What message am I to take to Ilka?"

"That I fight for her to the last drop of my blood!" exclaimed Gyula vehemently. "And see, take her this ring which she once gave me, and say that as surely as I have ever worn this ring, so surely will I set her free, or die in the attempt."

"Farewell!" said Alexis, putting on the white cloak again; "to-morrow, maybe, we shall meet as foes. Give me your hand as a token of friendship; and if a Magyar lance should pierce my heart, remember me sometimes when you return victorious to your country, and are living happily with your bride."

Another hasty farewell, and the new-made friends separated—Alexis to return to Belgrade; Gyula to lie down again on his panther-skin, with his face turned towards the fortress, and with but little chance of sleeping any more that night.

Meanwhile Alexis had not left Belgrade unobserved. There were sharp, suspicious eyes watching him; and while he was threading his way through the enemy's camp, Zimias, one of the officers of the garrison, was closeted with the governor.

The watchman had at first refused to allow Alexis to leave the city after dark, threatening him with all sorts of direful consequences; but at length yielded, knowing that he was in great favour with Niketas, and thinking that he might have been sent by him on some secret mission. The rumour had, however, excited a suspicion in the garrison that the governor was having some secret dealings with the enemy, and meant to betray the fortress. Such being the state of feeling, Zimias ventured to ask the governor for what object he had sent Alexis to

the Magyar camp; and as the governor indignantly disclaimed all knowledge of the matter, proceeded to tell him all he had learned from the watchman, adding that though it was past midnight Alexis had not yet returned.

"Let me know as soon as he returns. He has some secret which I must discover; but I can't believe he would deceive me," said Niketas; and then having given the officer his orders, he dismissed him, that he might if possible unravel the mystery alone. He argued with himself that Alexis was very unlike other people—that was one reason why he liked him; he hated a man like a doll, without the courage to take a decided step in any direction. But, turn traitor! No, he would not believe it; he was sure Alexis loved him. But then, again, Ilka might have tampered with him—might have worked upon his youth and inexperience, and brought him even to deceive his friend and benefactor. The more he thought of it, the more likely it seemed. He remembered many circumstances which all seemed to corroborate the idea; and then, hardened man that he was, a sharp pang darted through the governor's heart. Alexis was the only human being he had really loved. He had treated him with fatherly care; he had expected to find in him an open, boyish, grateful heart; and instead he found, or thought he had found, ingratitude and deception.

"If it is so," he exclaimed bitterly—"if he has deceived me—I will banish every better feeling from my heart, and I will devote my life to persecuting and humbling the hateful and degenerate human race. But I will have a word with Ilka. If there is a plot, she must be in it, and she shall be brought to confess it."

* * * *

In her miserable, dimly-lighted dungeon, Ilka was slowly pacing to and fro, unable to sleep, and restlessly wondering what was going on outside the thick walls of her prison. Day and night were alike gloomy to her; but still the knowledge that it was night, that there was darkness without as well as within, rendered her thoughts even more than usually dark and despondent. She was not wont to yield to painful forebodings when in the presence of others; but now that she was alone, her fortitude seemed to give way. Presently she drew from her dress a glittering steel dagger, the only possession which now remained to her. She looked at it steadily for an instant, while dark and terrible thoughts crossed her mind; but another moment and it was thrust hastily back into its hiding-place, and the captive maiden sank on her knees with an earnest prayer that her evil thought might be pardoned, and never suffered to gain dominion over her.

A few minutes later Niketas looked in, with an apology for disturbing her at so late an hour, but saying that he had important business with her, which would take but a few moments; and added he grimly, "You had better tell the truth at once, if you wish to escape my anger."

"And why should Ilka fear you?" demanded the girl, with dignified composure. "You have found out already that no words of yours take away my courage; and as for your dark dungeon, it has wrought no change in me. Speak! what do you want with me?"

"Confess what you and Alexis are plotting together. He has left the fortress; tell me where he is."

"Ask him yourself, if you want to know. You may be quite sure if he had told me any secret I should not betray him to you."

"Ilka, speak, I entreat you! for indeed I still wish you well."

"I see many proofs of your good wishes," said Ilka, contemptuously pointing to the dark walls of the dungeon; and the governor, after several more fruitless inquiries, left her in a rage, vowing vengeance upon her and Alexis.

Once more alone, Ilka wondered what could be the meaning of it all. Alexis had said nothing to her of his project, and she could imagine neither

what had induced him to leave Belgrade at so late an hour, nor where he could be gone. She had not, however, very long to remain in suspense, for Alexis presently hurried in, exclaiming, "Ilka, Ilka! you are saved!"

"Alexis! thank Heaven I see you again! I was afraid: the governor has just been in here asking for you."

"Ah, I guessed as much! but never mind; now I can die in peace, if need be—you will be safe."

"But I don't understand; where have you been?"

"I come from Gyula," said Alexis, pleased to watch her start of surprise. "See, here is something to convince you," he added, giving her the ring and Gyula's message.

"Ah, Alexis! how can I ever thank you? But tell me, what made you go? did you really see him himself?" inquired Ilka eagerly; and then, in few words, Alexis told her the fate to which Niketas destined her, and then detailed his adventures in the Magyar camp.

"No, Alexis, you shall not die!" she exclaimed, as he concluded. "Come to Hungary, where men have true hearts and are free—where good men are still honoured. Come with us, and be a Magyar too; they will receive you gladly, and we shall all live happily together."

"No," answered the young man sorrowfully;

"no; I am a Greek, and I too love my country, and cannot forsake it. No, Ilka, I cannot go with you—we must part; but I shall hear some day that you are happy, and then I shall know that you do not forget me, and that I have not lived in vain. If I should die—"

"Nay, Alexis," interrupted Ilka, "why will you talk of such melancholy things? You are young, why should you die?"

"My life has been happy," murmured the young Greek, "most happy, since I have accomplished my dearest wish; and now, now that I have done for you all that lies in my power, I am a Greek again, and to-morrow I shall go and fight like a hero with the Magyars. Farewell, Ilka, farewell! Perhaps I may not see you again."

Ilka gave him her hand, which he was in the act of raising to his lips, when a dark figure appeared in the doorway behind them, and stood there silent and unnoticed, watching them with hardly suppressed anger. Another word or two of farewell, and Alexis, turning to depart, found himself face to face with Niketas, who, without waiting for word or explanation, made a fierce thrust at him with his sword. The governor was mad with rage, and his thrust told home, for the young Greek fell bleeding to the ground at Ilka's feet, wounded to death.

"O merciful Heaven! Niketas, what have you

done?" she cried in horror, as the blood streamed from his wound.

"Ha! it vexes you, does it?" retorted the governor madly. "I brought him up as my own son, and he has betrayed me thus. Take heed, or your fate will be the same; your last hour is at hand." So saying, he stalked away, and his clanking footsteps echoed dismally on the stone steps, till even this sound died away, and Ilka was alone with the dying man. In vain she knelt by him, trying to stanch his wound. Life was ebbing fast, and he had hardly strength to murmur a few words in her ear ere his eyes closed for ever, and with her name on his smiling lips, Alexis was gone, made happy in his last moment by the knowledge that he had died to save her whom he had loved so devotedly and so unselfishly.

Slowly and sadly the night passed away, as Ilka knelt weeping and praying by the body of the murdered youth, thinking less that now she had lost her only protector, and was entirely at the governor's mercy, than of the self-devotion which had shielded her thus far.

She had lost a true and faithful brother and friend in Alexis; but Niketas had lost a son, and to him the night passed even more slowly and gloomily than to her. He had killed him in a moment of mad fury; but he said to himself that

military discipline required his death, and that he had killed him as a general, not as a father. But he could not argue away his grief, for he had loved Alexis; and now, to embitter him still further, came the thought that Ilka was the cause of it all. She had come between them, and tempted Alexis to his ruin, and she should pay for it—ay, that she should, and speedily. She should have one more chance, and if she refused it she should be buried alive! In thoughts like these, now of sorrow for Alexis, now of vengeance on Ilka, the night wore away; and when at length day began to dawn faintly in the east, he again sought the prison.

Ilka was still kneeling by the senseless corpse, but she darted up defiant as the governor's first soft tones fell on her ear.

"Although you have so sorely provoked me, Ilka, my love is stronger than my anger," he began softly; but she recoiled from him in horror.

"Murderer, away! don't come near me!"

Still he persevered. "Ilka, your happiness is yet in your own power—"

"Happiness! with *you?* What have you done but take me from one prison to another? Kill me at once, as you have killed him. I despise you and your power."

"Ilka, come, shake hands; I would not hurt you," said the governor, trying to look persuasive.

"Shake hands with you? never!" answered the maiden resolutely.

The governor was losing patience. There was anxious work before him, and no time to be lost; yet still he stood there parleying, becoming more and more enraged at her obstinacy, yet not able to make up his mind to leave her, and quite held in awe by her resolute demeanour.

"My lord general," cried a voice outside, "the enemy is already in motion; he has begun an attack upon the Danube Gate."

"Get along, and make haste about it," shouted Niketas in reply. "I shall be with you directly."

"Ah, my glorious king! my country! Now fight and conquer, and Ilka is free!" exclaimed the girl, too much excited at the news to heed the governor's presence.

"The enemy is storming our fortress," said he, with a scowl on his face; "but you must know—"

"They'll take it! they'll take it!—I know they will—and give you what you deserve."

"Don't be too sure of that. We have arms and weapons as well as they; and even if they should be victorious, it will do you no good; on the contrary, it will be your ruin, for if I leave you in this dungeon you must perish. No one will ever hear your cries, and here you will die a miserable death."

"Here, then, I will die, like a true Magyar!" replied Ilka, with unshaken firmness and resolution.

"Come with me, Ilka," said the governor once again. "I will take you out of the fortress. I have wealth and treasures enough to last all our lives. Come with me, and I will take you wherever you will. Ilka, on my knees I entreat you, hear me!"

"And you dare hope for love from me?" asked Ilka, with scornful wonder. "*You!* I despise both you and all your wealth."

No Roman maiden could have looked more grand and dignified than the Hungarian girl as she stood there, without a trace of fear on her beautiful face.

A loud knocking suddenly disturbed them. "General, they are making a general assault, and the soldiers are murmuring at your absence."

"Away with you! say I am coming," answered the irresolute governor; and then he turned to make a final appeal to Ilka.

It was equally fruitless; and determined to be balked no longer, Niketas seized her hand to drag her through the secret door. To struggle with him was of course in vain, and Ilka had too much dignity to attempt it. Indeed, her whole manner changed at once; and she said in a more gentle tone than the governor had ever heard her use to himself, "Niketas, one word."

The effect was magical. He released her hand at once, and she continued, still in the same tone, "Stay! if I were sure you were my friend, my real friend."

"Ilka!" exclaimed the delighted man, drawing her gently to himself, without, to his surprise, encountering any resistance.

She suffered him to do it—she who loathed the very sight of his blood-stained hands; but it was but for a moment. Suddenly she darted back, waving the sword which she had snatched from his side; and boldly confronting him, exclaimed, "Now, Sir Governor, command me; what is your will?"

Niketas could do nothing but shout for help; but long before any one came in answer to his cries, Ilka had fled swiftly away, all those whom she met on the way being too terrified at the apparition to have the presence of mind to arrest her flight. After a time two soldiers were sent in pursuit; but the morning was dark and windy, and their blazing torch gave a flickering, uncertain light; and, to tell the truth, the gallant Greeks were in some awe of the wild Hungarian girl, so that, when at length they did come up with her, and she confronted them with drawn sword, they made but a poor show of fight, and soon threw down the torch and fled.

Ilka picked it up, and disappeared with it among some neighbouring buildings, saying to herself, "I

will light the Magyars to victory!" And terribly she fulfilled her words; for in a short time flames were seen to burst out furiously, and from so many places that to extinguish them was impossible, while the wild Magyar maiden, sword in hand, was seen now here, now there, looking like an avenging deity presiding over and directing the work of destruction.

* * * *

"Magyars, the day is ours!" exclaimed Duke Géza, as he drew off his men into the great square of Belgrade. "The enemy is driven from all save the upper fort, and that he can't hold for long."

"No," rejoined Menyhárt; "Nándor is ours, and the Greek is humbled. Duke László is already in possession of the lower town."

"The fire threw all the Greeks into confusion," observed the duke. "They say it was kindled by some brave Magyar girl. In truth she has done us good service. But see now to extinguishing the fire and protecting the poor peasants. Heroes!" he added, turning to his men, "we are Magyars; we don't come to plunder."

Just then Zimias, one of the Greek officers, came up, accompanied by two soldiers, one carrying a white flag, the other the keys of the castle on a cushion. Zimias fell on his knees before the duke, praying with slavish submission for mercy.

"Get up!" said Géza, disliking and unaccustomed to such servile marks of honour; "get up! No Magyar injures an unarmed and defenceless foe. What is your desire?"

Then, as Zimias gave up the keys in the name of Niketas, praying for mercy and protection, the approach of the king was announced.

Duke Géza went forward to meet him, and offer his congratulations on the success of the siege; but Salamon answered, "Since Heaven has blessed our arms, our first thanks are due to the Eternal Judge;" and uncovering his head, he offered up a solemn prayer of thanksgiving: "Thou who hast watched the battle from thy throne of light, and hast everywhere supported the cause of truth, thine is the glory and the strength; thee only we adore."

This ended, he addressed the soldiers, thanking them for their courage; and turning to Ilka, who had been presented to him, he said, "You too, brave maiden, who have been the chief instrument of our victory, receive your king's welcome back to liberty. Hunnia is proud of you! I do not ask your name, for your noble soul has long since ennobled you."

"Ilka is my name, Magyarország is my home, a knight is my betrothed"—and Ilka's eye wandered restlessly round as she said the words—"the favour of my king and the love of my country are all my wealth and my greatest glory."

"My first thought shall be to reward you," answered the king. Then, turning to Zimias, who was still waiting, he bade him tell the governor that if he surrendered the fortress at once, and laid down his arms, he and his garrison might depart uninjured to their homes.

The officer departed, and Salamon, looking round on all his gallant knights, said at last, "Friends, we are all here but one: where is Gyula?"

No one knew. He had been seen first on the walls, and there Duke Géza had last seen his banner waving. He had lost sight of him in the castle, and had not seen him since.

"Has he perished?" cried Ilka, unmindful alike of the king and his knights. "O tell me! in pity, tell me, where is he?"

"What! you know our Bors Gyula?" inquired the king, half amused.

"Know him? ah yes! Don't keep me in this suspense."

"There he comes!" cried Menyhárt; and when in her delight Ilka was about to rush forward, the king good-naturedly held her back, and bidding her be quiet, placed himself before her.

Sadly Gyula was moving on, looking neither to right hand nor left. He had sought in vain; neither Ilka nor the youth was to be found. He had lost her again, just when he had fancied himself so near.

"Brave knight," said the king, "what grieves you? You have this day woven another fair flower into your chaplet: what favour can I grant you?"

"O my king, had I found a grave beneath the walls with many of my companions, I should be happy."

"Come, Gyula, though you refuse to ask, I have a reward in store for you," said the king, smiling; and while Gyula could hardly believe his eyes for astonishment, he led Ilka up to him, saying, "Receive your bride from the hands of your king!"

Loud shouts of "*Éljen! éljen! éljen jó királyunk!*"* rose from the whole army as Salamon restored the long-separated bride and bridegroom to one another, while Duke Géza called down upon them the blessing of Heaven.†

* "*Viva! viva!* long live our good king!"

† Founded on the play, "Ilka, vazy Nándorfehérvár bevétele," by K. Kisfaludy Károly.

A GOLDEN DEED.

"EAST and west, and south and north," King Béla's messengers were speeding over the freshly-fallen snow; and wherever the flash of their blood-stained swords was seen, there consternation fell on all—peasant and noble alike.

"To arms!" was their cry; "the Mongol is at the gates!" And waving on high the dreaded war-signal, they passed on like phantom horsemen—vanishing as suddenly as they had come, and leaving terror behind them.

For it was towards the close of the year 1240, and news had reached Hungary that Batu, a grandson of the renowned Dschingis Khan, had made himself master of the strong town of Kioff, on the Dnieper, and that the whole of Russia lay helpless at his feet. There was nothing, therefore, to prevent his leading his victorious hordes against Hungary; and Hungary was at this moment

utterly unprepared to resist him, though she had had more than one warning of the danger which threatened her.

The Dominican friar Julian had given the first alarm when he returned from his romantic search for "Hungaria Magna," saying that he had indeed discovered a Magyar-speaking people dwelling beyond the Volga, but that they were in imminent danger of being swallowed up by a conquering race, which had subdued the whole of Central Asia, had driven the Tatars from their steppes, and were preparing to go forth to fresh conquests in the west.

Friar Julian urged his countrymen to make active preparations for defending themselves against so formidable a foe; but it was all in vain. They listened with great interest to all the news he could give them of their distant kindred, and paid no heed to the rest.

But this was the last that was ever heard of the Magyars beyond the Volga, for Hungaria Magna was shortly afterwards overwhelmed by the Mongolian flood.

A second warning had come a few months later, when Kuthen, chief of the Kunok, appeared at Béla's court, asking an asylum for himself and the remnant of his people, who were flying before the face of the enemy.

Still the Hungarians did not take alarm. They complained bitterly, and not without cause, of the rude and lawless habits of the new-comers; and unjustly suspected the king of having brought them into the country to serve his own ends. They grumbled at the king's energetic reforms; and wasted in secret murmurs and open rebellion the precious time which should have been spent in putting the country into a state of defence.

Three years had elapsed since Friar Julian had brought back his message of warning; and now the enemy was at the very gates.

* * * *

"A king's messenger! a herald with the bloody sword!" shouted Count Imre's young son, rushing into the apartment where his father and a few friends were assembled one afternoon towards the close of the year 1240; and almost before the words had left the boy's lips, the whole company were at the castle gate.

"To arms!" cried the herald, waving the blood-stained sword as he paused for a moment to breathe his weary steed. "To arms! the Mongols are coming! Kioff has fallen, and the palatine is marching north to defend the frontier. To arms, in the king's name!"

Then putting spurs to his horse, he galloped away down the snow-covered road, and was speedily lost to sight in the gathering darkness.

Count Imre and his guests looked at one another for a few moments in silence, and then one of the number exclaimed, with a scornful laugh, "It's only the old story. The Mongols have been coming for years, but they have not come yet."

"And if they do come," exclaimed another, "we may thank those rascally Kunok for showing them the way."

"Ay," said a third; "I never trusted them. Who knows but they may be in league with the Russians, or even the Mongols themselves!"

"To arms, *in the king's name!*" exclaimed Count Imre, his dark eyes flashing as he spoke. "The country is in danger;" and without waiting to exchange another word with his lukewarm friends, he hurried away to begin his preparations at once.

Old and young were soon hard at work under his direction; arms were brought out to be furbished and sharpened, and the castle resounded with the clang of hammer and anvil until long after night had fallen. In two days' time all was ready. His servants and vassals were equipped and prepared to start with him at dawn the following morning; and the count, after a final survey of his arms, was about to retire to rest, when old Budiats András, his steward, came to him looking very woe-begone; for up to this time he had always followed his master everywhere, and had shared with him many

dangers and privations, and he could not bear the idea of being left at home now.

In vain the count reminded him that he was leaving his wife and children, all that he held most dear, in his keeping; András could not be content. He was ready to guard them faithfully, yes, and to die for them; but they would be safe in the Löwenstein without him, and his master might want him—he *must* go! It was impossible to resist his pleading, and when the drawbridge was lowered early the next morning, and Imre rode forth at the head of his warriors, Budiats András was there too, riding by his master's side, and carrying his three-pointed rapier.

Many a time the count looked back to wave his farewells to Agnes and the boys, the latter of whom looked on with eager, thoughtless excitement, as the waving plumes, glittering arms, and crimson banner wound their way down the hillside.

Meanwhile the rumoured approach of the Mongols had become a terrible certainty, and on the count's arrival in Pest, he heard that Batu Khan had had the audacity to call upon King Béla to do homage, and acknowledge the suzerainty of the Mongols, if he would save his kingdom from destruction.

The king urged, entreated, implored the states to arm at once and come to the support of the royal army, if they would save the fatherland. It was

no longer possible to doubt the truth of his earnest representations, and early in the new year the Diet passed the necessary resolutions for the calling out of the national forces.

But at the same time a loud and bitter cry was raised against the fugitive Kunok; and their prince, Kuthen, with all the Kun chiefs who happened to be in the capital, were suddenly made prisoners in their palace, and kept under the closest surveillance.

It was the 11th March, and Count Imre had just left the Diet, chafing at the endless delays which kept him idle in the city, when András hurried up to him, crying, "My lord, have you heard the news? A special messenger has just arrived from the palatine: the Mongols are preparing to cross the Carpathians, and his grace cannot hold the pass against them unless he is reinforced at once!"

"Reinforced! who is to reinforce him?" exclaimed the count bitterly. "Here has the Diet been assembled for a month past, and the troops are not yet under arms!"

But the finest army in the world could not have saved the palatine's little host. It was already too late; for the devoted band was even then falling before the deadly Mongol arrows; and three days after the arrival of his messenger, the Diet was startled by the sudden appearance in its midst of the palatine himself.

"The pass was in the hands of the enemy, his men were slain, and there was absolutely nothing now to stop the tide of invasion."

Such was the dismal tale he told; and so rapidly did the Mongols move forward that before the close of the same day the glare of burning villages announced to the inhabitants of Pest the almost incredible fact that the enemy was within half a day's ride of the capital; nor was it long before the black-and-white standards of the leather-clad barbarians were to be seen beneath the very walls.

Meanwhile scarcely a third of the Hungarian army was assembled, and Duke Friedrich of Austria, to whom the king had appealed for help in his extremity, though he had so far responded as to come in person, had brought with him so small a band of followers that it might have been supposed he was merely going out hunting; and there were not wanting those who believed that his real object was to spy out the land. During his short stay he contrived, however, to do irreparable mischief; for in a skirmish with the enemy just outside the walls he captured a prisoner, who unfortunately turned out to be one of the Kunok, whom the Mongols had taken and compelled, as they did all their captives, to fight in their foremost ranks.

Mistrusting the Kunok as they did already, the Hungarians were too enraged to listen to reason.

They were convinced now that the Kunok were in league with the Mongols, and an excited mob burst into the king's palace, made their way to the wing in which Prince Kuthen was lodged, killed the guards, and after a desperate struggle slew him and his children, and flung their heads into the street.

The news spread like wild-fire, and was the signal for an outburst of hostilities between the two races all over the country, and the Kun troops, who had been advancing to join the army, retreated south, destroying several towns on their way, and annihilating at least two small bodies of men who were on their way to the camp.

The army now numbered between sixty and seventy thousand men, all eager for the fight; and the rejoicings were great when at length the king was induced to give the order to march.

Slowly Batu Khan retired northwards as the Hungarians advanced; and by the time he had gained the river Sajó, he had been rejoined by the various hordes whom he had sent out to prosecute the work of plunder and destruction, and to defeat the Hungarians in detail before they could unite their forces. His vast host far outnumbered King Béla's army, yet not a sound was to be heard from it as it lay encamped among the marshes on the farther side of the river, apparently waiting for the Hungarians to take the initiative.

But one night there was great rejoicing in the Hungarian camp; for the Mongols, having made an unsuccessful attempt to cross the river under cover of the darkness, had been very vigorously repulsed, and the soldiers were celebrating their first success with songs and shouts of triumph. Gradually the noisy mirth was hushed, and one after another the men lay down to rest. Not a sound was to be heard through all the lines of tents but the occasional neighing and stamping of some restless horse, and the Hungarians slumbered as peacefully and securely as if there had been no foe within bow-shot of them.

The night-hours passed, and a faint light was beginning to streak the gray east, when the vast and silent host on the farther side of the river began to move, but so stealthily that the Hungarians slept on undisturbed. Noiselessly and swiftly, without so much as a shout or a battle-cry to give warning of their approach, they advanced towards the bridge, overpowered the guard before they could give the alarm, and then, still maintaining the same weird silence, flowed onward like a flood by bridge and ford without encountering any opposition.

The Hungarians slept on until, when morning dawned, they were roused by the cries of the fugitive outposts, to find themselves hemmed in on all sides by the barbarians.

In an instant all was confusion and hurrying to and fro of men and horses, unable to form in any sort of order, and getting inextricably entangled among the tents, which, as the keen eye of Batu Khan had not failed to observe, were pitched so close together as greatly to impede their movements.

Overhead the sky was darkened by clouds of murderous arrows. King and generals alike lost their presence of mind; discipline was at an end, and the tumult reached its climax when it was discovered that the waggon-bulwark was in flames, and that some of the outermost tents were already consumed.

Prince Kálmán, the king's brother, at length managed to rally his men, and making a desperate sortie, fought like a hero throughout the long day, until the two archbishops, three bishops, and the flower of the Hungarian nobility lay dead and dying on the field. Then, himself wounded to the death, and seeing that all was lost, he turned his horse's head and fled to Pest to warn the inhabitants of the fatal issue of the day.

Meanwhile Count Imre and his faithful squire had fought gallantly side by side, but they had fallen at last sorely wounded. The tide of battle had rolled over them, and when consciousness returned they found themselves prisoners. Of the

fate of the king and Prince Kálmán they could learn nothing, but they heard that the road towards Pest was strewn with the dead for two days' journey, and from all they could gather it seemed that this one battle had so entirely broken the strength of the Hungarian nation, that the whole country east of the Danube was at the mercy of the Mongols. For the present, however, the broad river was an effectual barrier against their advance westward, and the Löwenstein was therefore safe.

The prisoners had naturally but small opportunity of learning what was going on, and even this was soon taken from them; for when the booty and captives came to be divided, the count and his squire fell to the share of a khan named Kajdán; and found, to their horror, that they were to be sent forthwith to Tatary, under the care of some of the warriors who were returning home with their ill-gotten wealth. There was no possibility of escape; for even had they been less carefully guarded than was the case, both were suffering too much from their wounds to make any attempt at flight, otherwise than entirely hopeless; and they saw themselves condemned to life-long slavery and exile, without even being able to make known their fate to their families, who must be looking anxiously for tidings of them.

The only comfort was that they had been appor-

tioned to the same master; and as for the present they were chained together, they could at least talk over their misfortunes and pour out their lamentations into sympathizing ears.

And now the small, unshod horses of the Mongols had climbed the mountains like so many sure-footed chamois. The prisoners had looked their last upon their beloved Hungary, and were in a strange land, stripped of every valuable which might have enabled them to purchase their liberty; the only thing which the barbarians had overlooked or deemed not worth taking being a small medallion—a keepsake from his wife—which the count wore attached to a chain of her hair.

News of the fatal battle had in the meanwhile reached the Löwenstein, but for many a long day nothing positive was heard as to the fate of the count; and it was not until a whole weary month had gone by that the sole survivor of the band, which had sallied forth in such high spirits only a few months before, returned home to say that all but himself had perished, and that he had with his own eyes seen the count and András fall to the ground, pierced through and through with many darts.

It seemed, however, as if death would have been far preferable to the captives' actual lot; and, so far as regarded any prospect of release or return

home, it could hardly, they thought, have been more hopeless. They were hungering and thirsting for news of their wives and children, of their country, and of the gallant king. And sometimes at night the squire would hear his master groaning so piteously that he almost forgot his own misery in his desire to cheer him. But what could he say or do? It was absurd to hope that the hearts of their barbarous masters would ever be moved to pity; and as to the possibility of escaping, though András lay awake many a night turning it over in his mind, he could not but acknowledge that the difficulties in the way seemed altogether insurmountable. His left foot was chained to his master's right, and they were unable, therefore, to move more than a step or two independently. They certainly could not fly until the chain was severed, and they were without implements of any kind wherewith to sever it; so that until this difficulty was solved, it was altogether useless to think of anything beyond.

Months passed away without bringing any change to the captives; and the only break in the monotony of their existence was the return of Kajdán Khan, with more prisoners and a large quantity of booty. The new-comers were eagerly questioned as to the turn affairs were taking in Hungary, but they had no good news to tell. Prince Kálmán had died of his wounds; Pest and many another town had been

taken and destroyed; grass was growing in the once busy streets; and the fruitful plains on the eastern side of the Danube were reduced to a desert, where heaps of human bones lay whitening in the sun.

"But the west?" inquired Count Imre; "the fiends could never cross the Duna!"

"Alas!" was the answer, "the winter has been unusually severe. The Duna was frozen over, and the Mongols have taken Buda; but the citadel of Gran, and St. Martin's, and Székesfehérvár have escaped hitherto, thanks to St. Stephen."*

"And the Löwenstein?"

But the new-comer could give no tidings of the castle, and the count turned away disappointed, hardly heeding him when he went on to say that Kajdán had pursued the king even to the islands of the Adriatic; and that Batu had proposed to extend his conquests still further west, and had sent out his scouts almost as far as Vienna, but that the sudden news of the death of his uncle, the great Khan Oktai, had determined him to return to Korakorum and take the share to which his conquests entitled him in the election of his successor.

This was all the news the captives could obtain of the outer world, and it was the last that was likely to reach them; for like a swarm of locusts,

* All three were founded by King Stephen.

vanishing as completely and suddenly as they had come, the Mongols all quitted Hungary in the course of the year 1242, leaving the blackness of desolation behind them.

And now Kajdán determined to get as much as he could out of his slaves, and as their wounds were healed, he set them all to labour for him in various ways, still, however, keeping them chained together in couples. Count Imre being unaccustomed to toil, found the hard work and intense heat together almost more than he could stand. And when day was over and night brought with it some respite, he could scarcely hold himself upright, and tottered with feeble steps to the miserable bed which he shared with his squire. András, however weary, was less overcome by fatigue, and consequently more on the *qui vive*, more observant of what went on around him. There could not, of course, be much interest or variety in the life of a slave; but where all is monotony, small incidents become important; and when, one evening as they returned to their hut, András caught sight of a small hatchet which had been left forgotten on the ground, it was quite an event to him, and he pounced upon the implement at once, with as much excitement as if it had been a bag of gold. He had no definite idea as to the use he could make of it; but for all that he hid it under his clothes, feeling that he had

secured a treasure; and such wild hopes and visions were instantly conjured up in his mind, that he could hardly restrain his excitement.

The count had scarcely noticed what had happened; but András was so persuaded that in some way or other the hatchet would be the means of delivering them, that as he lay by his master's side that night he startled him by suddenly exclaiming, "*Éljen Magyarország!* Long live Hungary! Dear master, we shall see our land again, and the Löwenstein—I am sure of it!"

"Who knows whether the Löwenstein be even standing?" rejoined Imre gloomily.

"Nay," persisted the squire. "The walls are strong and the rock is steep; the barbarians could never have entered it. And besides, have we not prayed night and day—and," added the squire to himself, "is not this the beginning of the answer? The hatchet has not come for nothing; of that I am certain."

And András was right, though he was far indeed from guessing then the use to which it would be put. The confident hopefulness of his tone had its effect, however, and that night Count Imre slept more peacefully than he had done since the fatal battle of Mohi. His squire was too much excited to sleep himself, and lay awake hour after hour trying to form some plan for their escape; but

morning dawned, bringing with it the usual round of toil, before he had been able to settle anything. Still his confidence did not desert him; only, as he watched the count that day even more closely than usual, and contrasted the thin, bent figure before him with the strong man whom he had known in vigorous health and spirits two years before, his heart misgave him that unless relief came speedily it would be too late.

The neglected wounds, the intensity of the summer heat and winter cold, the hard toil and many privations, but, above all, the agony of mind he had endured and was enduring, had indeed made a terrible change in the once gay young lord of Löwenstein, and András felt that if the attempt to escape were made at all, it must be without delay.

He brought out the precious hatchet, therefore, again that night, when they were safe from interruption, and began nervously and eagerly to try to file through the chain; the count, meanwhile, watching with a feverish impatience which gradually changed to despair as time passed on and no perceptible progress was made.

Again and again András returned to the work, and again and again he was baffled. He could make no impression whatever on the strong iron links, and at last he was obliged to give it up and

admit that to sever the chain in this way was quite out of the question.

Count Imre had all along not been as hopeful as his squire; but this decision was like the shutting of a door which consigned him to utter and hopeless darkness, and quite overwhelmed him. Unable from bodily weakness to control his emotion, he threw himself on his pallet, and for some minutes struggled in vain to suppress the groans which would find vent.

András meanwhile watched him in heart-broken silence, reproaching himself bitterly for having excited hopes which he had not the power to fulfil. He would have done anything in the world to save the young master whom he had loved and served from childhood; but there was nothing, absolutely nothing, to do, and he must see him grow weaker and weaker, lingering out the rest of his miserable days in chains; and at last he must see him die a slave in a barbarous land, without being able to lift a finger to help him.

Stay, though, there was *one* way! It had not struck him before, and now as it flashed upon him, he recoiled from the thought in horror; but only for a moment. The next instant his resolution was taken, and once more seizing the hatchet, he exclaimed, "Dear master, listen! you shall be free this minute!" And as Imre looked up in uncompre-

hending astonishment, he brought the hatchet down with a swinging blow upon his own leg, completely severing the foot just above the ankle. The chain fell clanking to the ground, and Imre was free!

He had sprung to his feet at once; but for a moment stood transfixed with horror, until the sight of the bleeding stump recalled him to himself, and warned him to go for assistance.

"Stay!" gasped the squire, in tones of imploring entreaty; "don't call any one, don't disappoint me now—it was the only way; don't let it be in vain. I was glad to do it; only be quiet. Just shake hands with me once more, and then fly! fly now—at once—while it is still dark, before any one is stirring."

The poor man was in a fever of impatience; and sorely as it went against Imre to leave him in such a miserable plight, and to almost certain death, he felt that it would be even more cruel to remain and increase his suffering by making him feel that it was all to no purpose; so when he had done his best to bind up the wound, he yielded to the squire's urgent entreaties, and with many a promise that he would never cease to pray for his deliverer, and if ever he reached Hungary alive would teach his children to pray for him too, he bade him an affectionate farewell, and the next moment was standing outside the hut in the cold night air, once more a free man—

free, that is, but for the chain round one leg, of which just then he thought but little.

There was not a sound to be heard as he made his way past the rows of huts, yet every now and then Imre's heart beat thick and fast as he fancied he heard footsteps behind him; and it was not until he had got clear of all human habitations that he ventured to stop for a minute and consider how to shape his course. The stars were shining brightly, so that he had no difficulty in determining the points of the compass; and this once settled, on he went again through the night, until break of day warned him to seek some safe hiding-place, in case he should be pursued. For food he had nothing but such roots and herbs as he could find on the way; but fortunately it was spring-time and the nights were mild, and in the day, when he was obliged to rest, he was able to find some shelter from the already fierce heat of the sun.

Thus he journeyed on for many days, until at last, when he was so worn and spent and footsore that he could hardly drag himself a step further, he reached a village inhabited by Christians, who received him kindly and released him from the chain which he had hitherto dragged after him. They asked no questions, for they had received many a runaway slave before, and guessed at once whence he had come; but they supplied him with food and

clothes, and urged him to stay with them and recruit his strength.

This, however, he could not be prevailed upon to do, for his anxiety to hurry on increased day by day and hour by hour; and as soon as he had in some degree recovered his fatigue, he bade his friendly hosts adieu.

Soon after, his own Hungarian mountains appeared upon the horizon, and ere many days had elapsed he was standing once more on Hungarian ground. On he pressed in a sort of dream, at one moment grieving over the fate of his devoted servant, at another picturing the rapturous joy of seeing his wife and children; then mourning over the signs of ruin he saw around, and then again drinking in with delight the sound of his own Magyar tongue.

In the huts where he sometimes stopped to beg a night's lodging he heard terrible accounts of the cruelty of the Mongols—how thousands of his countrymen had been dragged away to slavery, while those who were not strong enough to perform the journey had been massacred wholesale; and how Hungarian children had been set up as marks for the Mongol boys to shoot at. He heard, too, how cruelly King Béla had been treated in his distress by his false friend the Duke of Austria, and how, when at last the barbarians had departed and he

had returned to Hungary, it was to find his once flourishing kingdom reduced to a wilderness, and the wretched inhabitants afraid to venture out of the dens and caves in which they had hidden themselves. The miserable country had been threatened with all the horrors of famine and pestilence, and ghastly tales were whispered of human flesh being exposed for sale, and of other horrors too dark and terrible to dwell upon.

All this and much more he heard; but of the Löwenstein and its inhabitants never a word, and his heart sank within him.

His long toilsome journey came to an end at last, and before him on its rocky height stood the Löwenstein, glowing in the light of the setting sun, its massive walls and towers as strong to all appearance as when he had last beheld it.

While he gazed, his heart beating faster and faster, the sound of a tolling bell floated down to him, and in much anxiety he made inquiries in the village, where none recognized him, whether anything were wrong at the castle.

"Wrong indeed!" was the answer; "the lord of Löwenstein is dead! It is two years to-morrow since he fell in battle, fighting for his country, and the countess grieves as much now as when she first heard of his death, and to-morrow we are all going to the castle for a solemn service in the chapel."

The count restrained his impatience for a few more hours, and went with the villagers early the next morning to the castle chapel, which was hung with black and lighted with innumerable tapers; but when he saw his wife come in clad with deep mourning, he very nearly betrayed himself at once, and had a hard matter to conceal his agitation.

The service over, he followed the peasants into the large hall, where Agnes and her two sons distributed alms to the poorest, with the request to all that they would pray for her husband's soul.

At last came his own turn; but just as Agnes was beginning her customary petition, her eye fell on the medallion which he wore round his neck, and she broke off hastily to ask when and where he had found it.

The next moment the hall was ringing from one end to the other with the news that the lord of Löwenstein, for whom they had been mourning and praying, had miraculously escaped from the Mongols and come home!

And what meanwhile had been the fate of Budiats András, the faithful squire?

He had swooned away soon after the count's departure, and was still unconscious when the overseer made his rounds in the morning. The man was aghast to find but one of his slaves in the hut, and that one bathed in blood and apparently almost

lifeless, and rushed off at once to inform the khan, who came himself to see what had happened.

András was with some difficulty restored to consciousness; but when questioned he declared at once that the injury was self-inflicted, that no one but himself was to blame, and that he had chopped off his foot to enable his master to escape.

The khan's face grew darker and darker, and he glared more and more fiercely at the poor squire; but finding at last that he could gain no further information, he turned sullenly away, giving orders that the fugitive should not be pursued, and that András should be attended to and kept alive if possible.

In a couple of months the squire was so far restored as to be able to stand with the help of a crutch, and then he was summoned to appear before the terrible khan.

He had long since made up his mind that he was doomed to death, and that his life had been spared for a time only that he might be punished with more cruel tortures, as an example to the other slaves.

"Do you repent of what you have done?" asked Kajdán fiercely; "or would you go through as much again to save your master?"

"That I would," answered András firmly. "I am ready to die for him."

"I don't want your life," returned the khan,

speaking more gently than he had ever been known to do before. And then, to the squire's utter amazement, he not only expressed approval of his deed, but gave him his liberty, and promised him clothes, arms, a good horse, and an escort as far as the Polish frontier.

It was all so unexpected, so different from the fate for which he had been preparing himself, that the squire fell at Kajdán's feet in a transport of speechless gratitude; and when he rose to express his thanks, the khan was gone.

Soon after he set forth on his journey to the Löwenstein, where it is not needful to say that he was warmly received. The count endowed him with an estate consisting of several villages; and, at his request, King Béla raised András to the rank of noble, and gave him for coat of arms a lion, to symbolize his courage, and a foot, with a chain hanging from it, to commemorate his act of self-devotion.

The descendants of Budiats András are many, and their property has increased; and to this day they display the foot and chain in their armorial bearings, in memory of their ancestor's golden deed.

THE VAJDA'S DAUGHTER.

ONE cold, foggy day in November in the year 1305, two travellers, mounted on weary horses, were approaching the little town of Füschamend, in Hungary; while a short distance behind them followed a waggon, drawn by strong Styrian horses, and evidently the property of some merchant. A dense fog had veiled the sun for several days past, and now road, bushes, stones, trees, nay, their very clothes, were covered thick with hoar-frost, and the elder of the two men, a wild, rough-looking individual, could not conceal his annoyance as his glossy black beard, frozen hard and stiff, scrubbed his dark armour, while the cold forced involuntary tears from his large black eyes, and his long hair rattled like a sheaf of icicles upon his fur cloak. The younger, a man of about six-and-twenty, was of much calmer aspect, and, far from echoing the murmurs of his companion, seemed almost insensible

to the disagreeables of the journey. His close-cut hair, simple burgher dress, and smooth-shaven face seemed to argue that he was in all probability the owner of the waggon which was jolting along in the rear. Either the cold or some internal excitement had given a glow to his face and added fire to his flashing blue eyes, while the constant smile on his lips seemed to say that his mind was occupied by some subject more engrossing than the discomforts around him. It was growing dark, and he peered about somewhat uneasily for his companion, who was a few paces in front of him.

"Whereabouts are we, Sir Raimond?" he inquired; "in this abominable fog I dare not trust myself."

"Straight on, your grace; fear nothing as long as you see me before you. I know the country well."

"How far can we be from the frontier?"

"An hour's trot, my lord."

"*Merchant Otter*," corrected the other. "Well, Merchant Otter is a good horseman."

"Then, 'Merchant Otter,' one little hour will see us at the frontier."

"Good! Let us put our horses to a trot, and you go on with your story, for I long to know everything about the country. Tell it me all again as if I had never heard it before."

"Well, as I was saying, the country has been in a strange state since the death of András III., the last descendant in the male line of the old royal house of Árpád. There are three rival kings, each with a party to back him. First there is Charles Robert of Naples, grandson of Béla IV.'s granddaughter Maria; and then there are two grandsons of Béla's own—Venceslav, King of Bohemia, and Otto, Duke of Bavaria. Just now the Bohemian party are in much perplexity, for King Venceslav has left the country, carrying the sacred crown with him, and it is said that he has resigned both it and his claims to the throne to his cousin Otto."

"Of course the Bohemian party will now join King Otto," said the young man confidently.

"They may, and they may *not*, for they too are split into three factions, and one can't be at all sure of them. But besides all these there is Lord Apor László, Vajda* of Erdély,† whose views are not very certain; and there is Csák Máté, the palatine, a whole host in himself, who has refrained from attaching himself to any party at present; and there are many other lords who will also require very discreet handling. In fact, King Otto will have a good deal of trouble before his authority is firmly established; and there is one piece of good advice I could give him—never to lose sight of the

* Governor. † Transylvania.

crown. So long as he keeps possession of that, he has a hold on the people; but if once he lets it go, he will have lost the only talisman which can make his throne secure."

"I promise you he shan't, on my honour, Raimond," said the young man, warmly grasping his companion's hand. After this conversation the two men rode on in silence, till the towers of Füschamend appeared through the darkening fog, which the last rays of the setting sun had no longer power to pierce. The whole landscape was wrapped in mist, and not a sound was to be heard save the weary trotting of the horses and the jolting of the waggon. At last a small building appeared by the roadside, with a sentry-box near it, and across the road was stretched a heavy iron chain, marking the Austro-Hungarian frontier. A soldier with a helmet on his head was pacing up and down before the sentry-box, lance in hand, while at a little distance stood the toll-keeper, clad in a long coat and wearing the Hungarian arms in the front of his cap.

In a few moments the travellers had reached the boundary, the waggon and its mounted attendants following slowly after them.

"Good-evening," cried the young man with the blue eyes, springing impetuously forward. "Is not this the Hungarian frontier?"

"I don't understand," answered the man gruffly.

"Please to say it in Latin. I am a Saracen, and I am in the service of Charles Robert, the man appointed by the legate."

"And I, your grace, am a Nürnberg merchant, and I am bringing a robe for the legate with me."

"Indeed! Well, we'll soon see; for I have strict orders to search everything. They say Duke Otto is on his way to Hungary, bringing the Holy Crown with him."

"Duke Otto? Ha! ha! My good man, you may have some time to wait for him, for when last I saw him he was doing the grand with King Venceslav in Prague, quite confident that he has everything in his own hands."

"Indeed! Maybe he has lost everything."

These words seemed to strike the young man disagreeably, for he turned hastily towards the waggon, peering anxiously into it, and at last almost dismounting in his eagerness to satisfy himself. His face turned deadly pale and then became crimson, the smile disappeared altogether from his lips, and his eyes looked as if they were starting out of his head.

Raimond watched him for a few moments in silence, then said carelessly, "Are you looking for the archbishop's sample of Rhenish wine? Here; I'll soon find it. It is in the small barrel."

"No, no, I'll do it; let me!" returned the other nervously.

"Take care," whispered Raimond, "or we are lost; the toll-keeper is suspicious. The barrel is gone," he continued aloud; "the leather bands have slipped. Some of you rascally fellows have been after it, I suppose; but if I find it, and there is any of the precious wine missing, I will cut off your ears with this spear."

With these words he put spurs to his horse and galloped away down the road by which they had come, while the merchant with assumed calmness dismounted from his horse, saying, "I am quite frozen. I should like to go into the house, my good man, while you are searching the waggon with my servants. I have no smuggled goods, and I shan't forget you."

"Ah, kind sir! I see your grace is a gentleman," said the man, with an obsequious bow, and in a much mollified tone of voice, as the young man went into the house.

Once there, alone and beyond the reach of curious eyes, the merchant fell on his knees, and continued in the same posture, trembling. Truly the wine he had lost must have been rare and costly!

Meanwhile Raimond dashed back at headlong speed, bending low from his horse, and scrutinizing the road with the eyes of a lynx.

"*Ordög és pokol!* thunder and lightning!" he growled; "this is a bad omen, Merchant Otter! If we have lost the barrel, the country is ruined; but find it I must and will, if I lose my life."

Grasping his drawn sword, he hurried on as if in pursuit of some unknown monster, the chill evening wind fluttering his black mantle, and the foam from the tired horse falling like white rags upon the frozen ground.

Füschamend had disappeared in the distance, and the thick evening darkness had settled down upon the earth like a curtain, and still the horseman dashed on, uttering from time to time loud ejaculations.

Night had set in, shrouding the whole landscape in gloom. The waggon was standing ready to depart, and the icy wind which had been blowing since sunset had in some measure dispersed the fog, and was now chasing the large black clouds across the sky, and causing the stars every now and then to shine out for a brief moment.

The barrier was passed, and all were on Hungarian ground—all save the merchant's lost barrel. Quite unmindful of the keen wind, he was standing gazing anxiously into the darkness. Hour after hour passed, and still he stood there waiting, and still the horseman did not return. Suddenly a regular monotonous sound was heard in the distance, and presently there

emerged from the darkness a weary form bearing something on its back.

"Is that you, Raimond?" asked the merchant in a low voice, as the horseman quietly approached the barrier.

"Yes, and I have found it; but I fear you won't get much out of it, for it had fallen into a ditch, and some of the mud has got into the wine."

So saying he swung the barrel over the chain. The merchant caught it, fastened it round his neck, and exclaimed earnestly, "While there is a heart in this breast, and while that heart is mine, no one on earth shall part thee and me! And now up, Raimond! Let us set off for my new country, in the name of God and the fatherland!"

Silently they remounted, and the little company travelled on into Hungary.

A month after this adventure, on the 6th December, Otto of Bavaria was crowned King of Hungary at Székesfehérvár (Stuhlweissenburg) with the crown which Otter the merchant had brought in the barrel and had so ominously lost on the road.

* * * *

Brightly the sun rose over Buda one May morning in the year 1306; and refreshing alike to body and soul was the sweet spring air which fanned the faces of the citizens who, in their gay holiday attire, were streaming through the streets to witness the

first tournament given by the new king to his faithful subjects. Great was the concourse of people; for there was not one who was not eager to see the man who had brought home the Holy Crown, and was said to love it so ardently that he wore it night and day; and besides, there were other attractions in the presence of Apor, Csák, and other great lords of the kingdom, who had not been to Buda in such numbers since the death of King András. Thousands pressed into the open space formed by St. George's Square, where the mimic fight was to be held, and around which rose the palaces of the grandees with their gay Italian gardens, whence many a glimpse was to be had of the broad Duna, and the twin capital, Pest, and the wooded heights, then dotted with summer villas, now known as Krisztinaváros.

The Vajda of Transylvania, Apor László, was a very remarkable man. While the haughty and powerful Csák Máté was for ever quarrelling, now with one party, now with another, Apor attached himself to no party in particular, and kept on good terms with all. No one thought of attempting to control him or exact obedience from him, because he had not given his decided adhesion to any one of the rival kings. He held aloof, ready to turn every circumstance to good account as it arose; and he governed Transylvania in absolute independence, with which no one attempted to interfere. Besides

possessing in an eminent degree the talent of diplomacy, Apor László was also blessed with a daughter; and as there was no maiden in all Hungary to be compared for beauty and goodness with the lovely Agnes, so was there no man throughout the kingdom who was a prouder father than Apor László. She was always at his side, whether he was in the camp or out hunting, or at church or in the Diet, for he could not bear her to be out of his sight.

On the present important occasion the vajda was occupying a magnificent palace, fronting the Duna, and belonging to his Highness the Palatine Csák Máté; and on this particular morning, while the crowd was gathering in the square, he and his daughter had not yet returned from their daily devotions in the neighbouring church. Meantime, two young men in gay military dress were standing together on the steps of the hall, one of them being our old acquaintance Raimond, the other Serény Imre, captain of the Székelyek, a fine handsome young man with a jet-black moustache and beard, curly hair, and bright eagle-eyes.

"What!" the latter was saying hastily, "the king wants to see Agnes?"

"Ay, indeed he does."

"But perhaps he has no such ideas—as you—fancy."

"Yes, he has."

"He has! a thousand whirlwinds!" exclaimed Serény, with darkening brow. "I am sorry to hear it; in fact—it's very painful to me."

"Annoys you, does it?" responded Raimond calmly.

"Listen, Raimond," continued the other eagerly: "nothing will ever come of it, I feel sure."

"May be so, and may be not."

Quite disgusted with the cool indifference of Raimond's answers, Serény at length moved away; and as he did so, there passed down the street Apor László on a full-blooded steed, and by his side, on a snow-white palfrey, his daughter Agnes. No maiden in Magyarország, so they said, had such bright black hair, such a white skin, such wondrous blue eyes, such a bewitching smile, and such a slender, well-formed figure. As for the vajda, it was a proud moment for him when the people thronged round to look at the man who ruled a kingdom, and there was an expression of satisfied pride in his small gray eyes as he raised them from the gold-embroidered trappings of his horse and quietly met the gaze of the crowd. A few moments later, father and daughter were alone together in one of the large saloons of the palace, and Apor was saying coaxingly, "My sweet Agnes, only do as I beg you!"

"Very well, father," answered the girl, with a

smile; "but may I not know why you care so much about my taking part in this tournament?"

"No, no, no! *édes Agnésem*, leave it all to me! You know you are dearer to me than aught besides. You know, my heart's child, that I am Apor the vajda, and—I have a great deal to think of. The country loves me—much. But now, my turtle-dove, I have no time to lose. Only take care of yourself, and do as I beg."

So saying, Apor embraced his daughter and hurried from the room. For a few moments Agnes stood where he had left her, apparently thinking; then with a smile she raised her head and went into an adjoining apartment, where a young page was awaiting her orders. Bidding him send her maid Margit to her with her white velvet riding habit, while he saddled the two white horses Szellö and Tündér, Agnes passed on into her bedchamber.

Small peace of mind would the gallant Serény Imre have enjoyed had he known how his fair lady was engaged.

Meantime King Otto, who was likewise preparing for the tournament, had taken many a survey of himself in the Venetian mirror, and was now gazing again for the last time at his crown-encircled head. At length he fastened on his sword, and bade his page give him his scarlet mantle and announce to the palatine that he was ready.

Half-an-hour later, accompanied by Csák, Apor, and other dignitaries, he ascended a sort of throne erected for him in the square, and stood bowing to the assembled throng, while Serény, Raimond, and many others entered the lists, and the heralds blew a flourish of trumpets to bring spectators and combatants to order. The contest lasted some time, and Serény and Raimond, having vanquished all who opposed them, continued the strife alone, until by a lucky stroke the Székely chief unhorsed his adversary, and received from the king's herald the banner which was the prize of the victor. And now Apor arose, and bringing out from under his furred *mente* a beautifully embroidered sword-belt, spoke as follows:—"Gracious king, and you my noble lords, this belt is the work of my daughter, and she hopes it may be contended for on the present happy occasion, for which it has been prepared."

A thrill of excitement ran through the crowd as Apor finished his short speech, and all were anxious to obtain a glimpse of the belt, for the chance of winning which a hundred eager youths at once rushed into the lists; but the general interest rose to a yet higher pitch when it was noised about that the king himself was going to take part in the contest.

"My Lord Apor," observed Csák to the vajda,

as the king prepared to descend into the arena, still wearing the crown, "my lord the king seems much attached to the crown."

"Well, Máté, never mind who wears it, so long as he puts it on more securely than did your grace's king, Venceslav."

"Nay, Lord Apor, I hear it has already been once lost on the road, and I much fear the reign will be a short one."

"As Heaven wills," answered the vajda solemnly

Meanwhile the king had entered the lists, clad entirely in scarlet velvet, and holding darts of a similar colour in his hand; and the knights had divested themselves of their armour, and ranged themselves on either side: but as no one quite liked to encounter the king, they dropped off one by one, till at last there remained but four competitors—two in scarlet, namely, the king and Raimond; and two in white, one of whom was Serény, and the other a youth of very juvenile, almost boyish, appearance, who had hitherto escaped notice.

"Who are you, my unknown knight?" asked the king, observing his closed helmet; "we contend unarmed."

But the unknown merely shook his head, making no reply, and the mimic strife began. Each knight was provided with four darts, ornamented with his

own colour, and victory depended upon the number of times he could succeed in hitting his adversary. It was a very favourite sport with the Hungarians, and one which required great agility and most dexterous horsemanship.

After a while Serény and Raimond withdrew, and the king and the unknown knight were left to continue the contest alone, amid the most profound silence and the most intense excitement. The knight's skill astonished every one; for he and his horse seemed to be as thoroughly one as if there were but a single will between them. Already the king has been twice hit, the knight not once; and in fact the former, embarrassed as he is with his crown and afraid of moving quickly, is decidedly losing the game. Now another white dart hits him; and then another! He is vanquished!

Raising his hand in most undignified fashion to feel for the crown which was sitting firmly enough on his head, the king now, amidst the plaudits of the people, called upon the unknown knight to declare himself after the usual custom; and at his word the visor was raised, the helmet fell to the ground, and Apor Agnes, with blushing face and flashing eyes, stood revealed to the astonished gaze of King Otto.

"I am the vajda's daughter," said she, bending low before him; "and though I have vanquished

you, my lord, yet if you will allow me, I shall be happy to present you with the sword-belt in memory of this day's tournament."

The king's susceptible heart was at once touched, and half bewitched by the girl's beauty and the strangeness of the adventure, and wholly forgetting his prudence, he impetuously spurred his horse forward, and extended his hand to receive the promised gift from the maiden's hand. As he did so, behold, the precious crown fell from his head!

"Lord Apor László," observed Csák Máté to the vajda at this instant, with a smile of doubtful significance, "the reign will certainly be a short one."

"As Heaven wills," answered Apor with great solemnity, never raising his eyes from the king and his daughter. The king, with the crown once more safely on his head, was now leading her to the throne, and Apor thought with natural pride that she looked beautiful and graceful enough to be a queen. "Ay," he added, as he watched the pair and noted the eagerness with which Otto drank in every word that fell from the girl's lips—"ay, and she *will* be a queen."

Raimond, meanwhile, who had been an equally keen and interested observer of all that went on, was just then muttering to himself, "Well, Sir King, you have lost your heart to her, that's certain, and

your crown too, to all appearance; so we may now cry, '*Éljen* Apor László,'" when some one struck him on the shoulder, and a voice whispered close to his ear, "Nothing will come of it, my friend, till Serény Imre tells you so."

* * * *

A beautiful starlight evening had succeeded the eventful day of the tournament, and Agnes wandered out into the palace garden, to cool her burning brow and to try to recover from the excitement of the morning. The sweet chant of the nuns in the dark convent of Margitsziget was ever and anon borne to her on the soft evening air, while sounds of loud merriment echoed from the royal castle, where there was much rejoicing over the tidings just arrived from Bohemia of the death of King Venceslav, or Cseh László, as the Hungarians called him—an event which would relieve both Otto and his subjects from much embarrassment.

Agnes was standing on one of the garden terraces which overhung the Danube, and as she leaned against the balustrade, gazing intently into the darkness, various thoughts passed quickly and restlessly through her mind. King Otto was in love with her, that was clear; and her father was pleased, that was equally certain; and the question which recurred again and again to her troubled mind was this: "Shall I be a queen, or shall I be a happy wife?

My father wishes it; but what would Serény Imre say? Queen of Magyarország and Erdély—"

At this point her meditations were interrupted by the sound of footsteps approaching down one of the garden paths; and in another moment she beheld the Székely captain.

No sooner did he perceive her than, hurrying up and throwing off his fur *kalpag*, he exclaimed with great vehemence, "A curse on me and my nation if ever you become the wife of another man than myself! I could send a hundred kings to Hades if need were."

"What's the matter, Imre?" said the girl, disengaging herself from his excited grasp; "what has come to you? Why use such mad language?"

"It is no madness, girl; don't you know the vajda's plans? He wants to make you the king's wife!—listen, Agnes, *you* the king's wife!—that I may turn Templar and die in the Holy Land fighting the infidel, while this fine new king—"

"Be reasonable, Imre; where is it decreed that I am to be queen?"

"Where? in the king's palace, in your father's mind, and in the king's heart, for he is in love with you, so they say."

"Well, and can I help it if he is?"

The Székely captain looked up in speechless astonishment as Agnes uttered these words, and a

sharp pang shot through his heart as, roughly shaking her hand from his arm, he turned away, exclaiming bitterly, "Woman, woman! always the same as long as the world lasts; a man is a fool to expect anything else. Heart!—you have none! caught by a crown or any other bauble."

"Can you really believe I care for the crown, Imre?" said Agnes gently, fearing she had gone too far, and anxious to do away the impression of her words. "No, no; you *must* know that I value your love far more than all King Otto's splendour, and that I should be happier with you, even if I had only the peasant girl's ribbons in my hair, than all his jewels could make me."

Serény's gloomy face began to brighten at these words, and as the stars smiled peacefully down on them, the lovers exchanged vows of eternal love and constancy, while the wind wafted gently across the Danube the far-off sound of the nuns' hymns.

Meanwhile Apor László, having withdrawn from the assembled guests, was sitting in his own apartment buried in deep thought.

"The king is in love with my daughter, that's a fact," he mused; "whether Agnes likes him is another question, but I believe she will be reasonable and drive the Székely chief out of her head for the sake of the crown. Then again, what will Csák say? Will he guess? No, no, not he; he would never

give me credit for such schemes. But the founder of my house was one of the seven great Magyar chiefs, and am I not lord of Erdély, and is not Erdély bound up with Hungary? But if Agnes refuses, shall I compel her? No, not for a thousand kings; but I will get hold of the crown in another way—ay, quite another way—but get it into my hands I must, or it will get lost, and we shall be hunting and driving kings about for the next hundred years, till the land is turned into a regular wilderness."

Just as he had arrived at this conclusion, the door opened, and admitted the three great lords, Csák, Benedek, and Henrik.

"We have been looking for your highness," said the palatine, taking a seat on the vajda's right hand.

"You have left his majesty?"

"The king desired to be alone, and has retired to his apartments with his squire Raimond."

"With the crown on his head, of course! Ha! ha!"

"It is just as well he should keep it on his head, my lord bishop," said Apor; "he had better take care of it, for you know I take pattern by your highness, and you have been thrice a Carlist, and twice a Venceslavist, and who knows to what party you will attach yourself before you have done?"

"Still I put the crown on his head," said the bishop in his usual phlegmatic manner, quite undisturbed by the vajda's irony.

"Come, a truce to this jesting," interposed Csák; "we have some very important business to settle. The king must have a wife, and the nation a queen. Have you thought of any one who would be suitable? I ask you, my Lord Apor."

First Apor shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, for though the question touched him nearly, it would not do to show it, and at length he said with much solemnity, "The lady he chooses for himself, I should say."

"And you, Count Henrik?"

"I? Let him wait."

"And you, holy father?"

"I never interfere in such matters; you find the queen, and I will crown her."

"Then it is my turn. I, Csák Máté, the palatine, would fain bring good out of the evil done by the nation. I say, let us place on the throne the rightful heiress, the Princess Erzsébet, the daughter of our late king, the last of the Árpáds. We could not get Cseh László to marry her, but we may manage King Otto better."

"Palatine, I protest," cried the bishop; "she already belongs to the Church."

"Don't tell me, when it's all your fault that such disgrace has befallen the country! Had she followed my advice, she might have been queen now. The Church? As far as I know, she has not yet taken

the vows; and if she has, can't I release her from them?"

The palatine, as has already appeared, was a haughty man who brooked no contradiction; and as he owned thirty-two castles, and could command the services of ten thousand soldiers, he was the real king of Hungary, and Otto was but a shadow.

On the present occasion no one ventured to oppose him; and he accordingly withdrew to seek an interview with the king, while Apor remained another half-hour closeted with Henrik and Benedek, who shook hands with him very heartily when at last he retired to visit his daughter.

Meanwhile Csák sought the king's apartments; but Otto at first declined to see him, sending out a message that he was tired and could not give audience to any one else that night.

"Tell his majesty, Sir Knight," said the intolerant palatine, "that the King of Hungary, if he wishes to remain king, *always* gives audience to the Nádor."

Otto found himself obliged to yield; and Csák, being admitted, began without any preamble to inform him that it was the nation's wish that he should immediately send an embassy to Switzerland, and ask the hand of the Princess Erzsébet.

"But I can't," interposed Otto. "I don't want to go abroad for a wife."

"Your majesty refuses to do as I wish?"

"But, my dear Nádor, the fact is, I am so desperately in love! I can't exist without her, I adore her; and I am certain the nation will be rejoiced that I should raise the fairest of her daughters to the throne."

"Hum! And who may this fair damsel be?" inquired the grim palatine.

"Who should it be but Apor Agnes?" replied the enchanted Otto. "I swear I will marry no one else; and now leave me, for my head and heart are full."

Csák Máté made no further attempt to urge his suit, for Otto had given him a rather tough morsel to digest; and he felt that he must have time and solitude in which to perform the process. He therefore withdrew at once; but outside the door he tarried a moment to utter a word of warning to Raimond.

"Listen, Sir Knight," said he ominously: "tell the king he had better mind what he is about, or his reign will certainly be a short one."

So saying, he strode away, and the dark stone passages of the palace long re-echoed with the sound of his firm footsteps.

* * * *

That Apor Agnes had in more senses than one made a conquest of the king at the tournament was well known throughout Hungary and Transylvania;

and it was also believed that he was so desperately in love as to be bent on marrying her at all costs. Yet still a whole year had passed away, and though there had been plenty of gossip, nothing had come of it. People said it was all the palatine's doing—that he was bent on making the Princess Erzsébet queen, and that King Otto could not venture to oppose him.

The fact, indeed, was patent to all that Otto had not gained much ground during the last twelvemonth, and that he was still but the shadow of a king, while the real rulers were Csák, Apor, and the Güssinger, who rendered him as much or as little obedience as suited them.

Now, however, it was whispered that the palatine had withdrawn his objections, that Otto was actually going to Gyulafehérvár to be betrothed to the vajda's daughter, and that Charles Robert, who was still hovering in Dalmatia, might as well make up his mind to go back to Italy at once; for if Csák and Apor were of the same mind, he would have not the slightest chance of making head against them.

It was early in the spring of 1307, when one evening Apor László entered his daughter's room, which was in the south wing of the castle, and commanded a splendid view of the river Maros with the distant mountains. The sun was just setting,

and his last rays were illuminating the fair face of the maiden, whom Apor for a moment contemplated in silence, thinking to himself what a noble queen she would make.

"My dear child," he said at length, "the king will be here before long, according to the Nádor's letter. But before he arrives, I want to ask you just one question: Have you quite made up your mind not to become Otto's guiding-star?"

"Quite, dear father. I don't want the crown; I had much rather be happy."

"Well, well, you shall do as you like; but here is a letter which I will leave with you to read. Perhaps its contents may startle you a little; but if, after reading it, you would like to change your mind and be queen, you have only to say the word, and we will snap our fingers at the emperor. Otherwise I can't do better than oblige him, for as you must see, and every one must see, things are not in a satisfactory state at present. However, we will say no more about it; I leave it in your hands."

So saying, Apor hastened away to prepare for the king's arrival; and Agnes, having opened the mysterious letter, began to glance over it, her face growing paler and paler, and her heart swelling within her as she read its contents. Again and again she read it through, and each time the expression of her face became more sad.

"Unlucky king!" she murmured; "why did we ever meet? It is all through me; and what can I do? how can I save you? If only Imre were here! but he is far away."

She began to consider, and her thoughts were still busy with the details of some plan she had in her head, when she heard the distant sound of horses' hoofs, and looking up she beheld a brilliant train of knights approaching the castle. Their plumes waved gaily in the air, and the king was especially conspicuous as he rode at their head mounted on a white horse. As Agnes watched him, two tears gathered slowly in her eyes and fell down her cheeks; this was all she could give the king in return for his love.

It was night, and Gyulafehérvár was wrapped in profound silence, though but a couple of hours earlier it had been full of unusual noise and bustle. The guards, having been induced by the vajda's men to drink deeply of the good Hungarian wine, were buried in sleep; and the old castellan, having been round to the patrols for the last time, had likewise betaken himself to rest. In only three rooms of the castle were lights still burning: in the treasury, to which the vajda was just now cautiously conveying the crown; and in the apartments occupied respectively by Agnes and the king.

The king's apartment was a most sumptuous one

in the eastern tower, and he was just now lying on an ebony bedstead beneath a canopy of crimson silk, too restless to sleep, and wishing only that he could get out into the open air and cool his fevered brain.

But somehow he felt overpowered with unusual languor, and so lay motionless, gazing up at a picture of the vajda's daughter which had attracted his attention directly he entered the room. "It is she, it is she!" he exclaimed ecstatically, "and to-morrow she will be mine. What a fight I have had for her with the nobles and my own family! But—ah! where is my crown? surely I put it by the side of the bed. I can't move—I am dreaming—I must be dreaming. The vajda attended me to my room; surely I did not see it on his head! What an absurd fancy! No, Agnes, my angel, to-morrow I shall see it on her head. I am the happiest man in the world. Am I awake or dreaming? Ah, the lamp is gone out!"

At length King Otto closed his eyes and slept.

An hour or two later, Agnes cautiously opened the door and looked in; the room looked much as it had done the day before, only the curtains of the bed were drawn close, and the lamp was out. She listened, but could hear nothing, not even a breath; there was a dead silence. Trembling and hesitating, she at last took courage, went a little further, and peeped through the curtains. There was no one

there—the bed was empty! she was too late; and with a shuddering sigh she turned away. A few minutes later the sound of the watchman's horn broke in upon the silence of the night. Some one wanted to leave the castle.

"*Ki vagy?*" cried the watchman; and looking out from his tower, he beheld a man on horseback, who exclaimed, "Let me out at once, as you value your head. My business is urgent."

Without a word the watchman drew up the bar of the gate, and let out the horseman, who galloped off at a rapid pace.

"Lörinc the page," muttered the watchman, as he gazed after him for a moment; "and where, I should like to know, can our young lady be sending her favourite page at this time of night?"

At last perfect rest and silence sank down upon Gyulafehérvár; not a light was to be seen in the castle, and darkness reigned alike in the king's room, in the treasury, and in the apartments of the vajda's daughter.

* * * *

The sun rose brightly the next morning; but when the king awoke he was in utter darkness, and fancied he must be still dreaming. The air which blew in his face was damp and chill, and the most deathly silence reigned around. He could see nothing, hear nothing; and the only thing of which he

was certain was that he was still in bed. In vain he looked for the picture which had so charmed his eyes the previous night: something had happened to him, but what it was he could not make out; and as he lay motionless, almost holding his breath, he was seized with a sudden vague alarm, and began to tremble violently. He could see absolutely nothing, but he *felt* instinctively that he was not in the same place in which he had closed his eyes. What had befallen him he dared not think, and yet in spite of himself he was beginning to suspect.

When some time had elapsed, a light appeared in the ceiling above; then he fancied he saw shadows; then again there was utter darkness; but it did not last long. A lamp was lowered from the ceiling; he could see; and his worst fears were realized.

"I am a prisoner!" he exclaimed, half-mad with terror, as he looked round and saw that he was in a dungeon closely barred; and leaping from his bed, he rushed to the door and shook it violently; but the strong iron bolts yielded not a whit.

Next he looked for his clothes, his gay crimson clothes, in which he had cut so gallant a figure only yesterday; and, behold, with a start of surprise he saw in their place the disguise which he had worn as Otter the merchant, and had always kept by him as a souvenir.

"I am betrayed! my crown has been taken from

me again!" he exclaimed bitterly; and sinking down on the bed he gave way to a fit of weeping. Then he fancied he heard some one descending the steps which led to the door of his prison, and hope again revived in his breast. Some one did stop outside, and after a few moments the iron door opened and admitted Raimond, and then immediately closed again.

"Raimond, is it you?" exclaimed the unfortunate king.

"It is I indeed, Merchant Otter. Lord Apor wishes to explain; he thinks you may be annoyed with him."

"Speak, speak!" exclaimed Otto impatiently; "I am half-mad!"

"Well, I told you I was afraid the wine in your barrel had got mixed with mud. It was a bad omen, as I thought at the time, and as is now proved. The wise Socrates says that no general, however skilful, can tell beforehand whether he will win the battle or no; nor does the man who marries a fair wife know but that she may occasion him much bitterness of soul. Much more hazardous is it for a man, and that man a king, to wish to marry a girl who loves not himself but some one else."

"Agnes loves some one else! did she tell you so?"

"No, my lord; but the wise Socrates says again that a man is made king, not that he may think

only of pleasing himself, but that he may please those who elected him. You, on the contrary, would not listen to the voice of the nation, for the nation wished you to marry the Princess Erzsébet; and had you done so, Csák and others would have supported you with all their strength. But you preferred Apor Agnes; and had she returned your affection, all might have been well in time—even Csák Máté would have consented to your marriage sooner or later; but Agnes prefers some one else, and the vajda will not sacrifice his daughter to you."

"But still, why am I imprisoned, and why is my crown taken from me?"

"Because you are not strong enough to guard it. Benedek laughed at you for your excessive attachment to it, and Csák despised you for it. Ah, my lord, it is a difficult country to govern! You know you are out of favour with the emperor, who indeed wants Hungary for himself; and though he is not likely to get it, the vajda was willing enough to do him a favour, *for a consideration*, and glad, too, to get the crown into his own safe custody, since Apor Agnes would not have it; and you may be sure he will keep it safe until the nation has had enough of revolutions."

"And what is to become of me?"

"That, I suppose, depends on the pleasure of his Majesty the emperor."

Just then a servant came in, bringing the king's breakfast on a gold service; and soon after Raimond left him. He was alone all day, and had full leisure to think over his situation. He did not know whether to regret most the loss of his bride or the loss of his crown; but he thought of the tournament and of all that had happened since his first arrival in Hungary, and amid many bitter-sweet remembrances he at last fell asleep.

It is hardly necessary to say that Agnes had hoped to be in time to warn the king of the fate which awaited him; and failing this, she had started off for Székelyföld to seek Serény Imre and claim his assistance. But when Apor went to pay her his usual morning visit and found her flown, his despair knew no bounds. In vain he sent messengers hither and thither in all directions: no one could give him any tidings of his daughter; and in his misery he forgot Otto and the crown, and Charles Robert, and the emperor. He went about the castle like a madman; and when a whole week passed without bringing any news of the fugitive, he began to grow gray and thin, and could neither eat, drink, nor sleep.

At length one day Serény Imre appeared before Gyulafehérvár, at the head of three thousand men; and as he was well known to the guards, no opposition was made to his entrance into the castle-yard at once, before the vajda knew of his arrival.

As soon, however, as Apor saw him, he fell on his neck, sobbing and weeping as if his heart would break.

But the young man, indignantly drawing back, exclaimed, "I hear, my Lord Vajda, that you have obliged your daughter to marry the king; say, is it true?"

"No, no; ah, no, my dear son."

"I shan't believe you until I see her."

"I wish nothing better," sobbed Apor; "but I have lost her—she is gone! My dear daughter—my Agnes! she is gone—she is lost!"

"No, she is not lost," said Imre, seeing that by this time his followers had closed every gate and possible way of escape. "She is not lost, my dear Lord Apor, but safe in the Székelyföld, where she arrived five days ago. However, as she refuses to return to you or to become my wife as long as the Bavarian remains in yonder tower, I have been obliged to come and see what can be done. You must promise not to hurt a hair of his head, and to set him free with all convenient speed."

The vajda felt that he was now caught indeed, and that, unless he gave the required promise, not only would the captain take the matter into his own hands, but his high-spirited daughter would keep her word; and after a few moments' hesitation, his paternal feelings carried the day.

"Well, very well," he murmured; "let it be as you will. No one shall hurt him as long as he stays, and he shall be set free as soon as possible; but you understand it can't be just directly—there are certain formalities. I must consult the Nádor. But he shall have his liberty, that I promise; and if his majesty makes a revolution—"

But a revolution was the last thing Bajor Otto thought of; his only wish was to get away out of the country as quickly as possible, and to accomplish this he was ready to promise anything. Still, what with one delay and another, his release was postponed for some time; indeed a whole year passed away, and still he was a prisoner, well treated according to the ideas of the time, but carefully guarded. Then, however, his enemy the emperor came to an untimely end; and as Apor had nothing further to gain by detaining him, he yielded at length to the pressure brought to bear on him by Serény, who was the more urgent because he knew the hopelessness of thinking to gain his bride so long as the royal captive remained in Gyulafehérvár.

One fair May-day a little band of horsemen might have been seen on the summit of Borgo, among whom were a pale-faced man and a youth in burgher costume, who kept his eyes fixed on the ground, and seemed to take no notice of what went on around him.

"My lord," said one of the horsemen, "shall we halt here? We are still some distance from the first village of the Bukovina, and the horses can't go any further; we have come an enormous distance in the last two days."

"Never mind; no matter, we will halt when we reach the other side of the frontier, not before."

So on they went again, over hill and dale, till they reached the frontier, where the young man presented a short letter from Apor to the official, and was allowed to pass without difficulty. "I feel more easy now that I am out of that wretched country, where they depose to-day the man whom they elected yesterday. Still I don't deny that my heart is heavy," said Otter the merchant.

The little band pitched their tents for the night, and made a huge blazing fire; but Otto kept apart from the rest, in a place whence he could see the grand outlines of the country he had just quitted. There he lay gazing back at Transylvania, and as he gazed he recalled one by one all the events of his short reign, and thought of the maiden to whom he owed his freedom, and for whom his heart still yearned. Fixedly he gazed, until the whole landscape was hidden from his sight by a mist of tears.

It was thus Bajor Otto took leave of Magyarország.

* * * *

There was a grand wedding in Gyulafehérvár, and the vajda's daughter for the first time put on the matronly *fökötö.*

"Ah, how well you would have looked with a crown on your head!" sighed Apor, as Serény Imre led her up to him at the conclusion of the marriage ceremony.

"Nay, father," answered Agnes joyously: "for now I feel sure that I shall wear the crown of happiness; whereas, with a crown of gold on my head, it is more than possible that my happiness would have been short-lived. God grant our country a king who shall be as happy as I."

Agnes, the vajda's daughter, lived to see the accomplishment of her wish. Apor guarded the sacred crown of St. Stephen as jealously as ever dragon guarded his treasure; nor would he give it up until the nation's choice of a king had been expressed in unmistakable terms.

But when at last the crown was placed on Charles Robert's head, it remained there during a glorious reign of many years.*

* From the Hungarian of Válkai Imre, "Hazánk sa Külföld," 1865.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

IN the spring of the year 1442, when Vladislav was king of Hungary and Poland, the Turkish general Mezet Bég broke into Transylvania with an immense army; and Hunyadi János, Hungary's great captain, not daring to draw any men away from the frontier, made haste to raise what force he could in Transylvania itself, of which he was now vajda or governor.

With the help of Bishop Lepes—for even bishops went out to fight against the Turks—he succeeded in cutting off a Turkish division at Maros Szent Imre; but unluckily the main body of the army came up more speedily than he had expected, and though the vajda managed to effect his retreat in good time, the bishop, who had pressed forward too eagerly, fell from his horse as he was attempting to cross the river Ompoly, and was immediately seized and beheaded.

Mezet Bég did not follow up his victory as he might have done, however. His chief thought was of plunder, and he led his army towards the town of Nagy Szeben (Hermannstadt), whose inhabitants defended themselves with the greatest determination, and thus gave Hunyadi time to raise the banderia of the neighbouring counties, and to summon the Székelyek and Saxons to his assistance.

The Hungarian army was now encamped on the wide plain of Kenyérmezö, the Field of Bread, as it was called from its great fertility, and the Turkish camp was not far off; indeed, as the evening closed in, its fires could be plainly seen in the distance. A battle was expected on the following day; and there were many anxious hearts among the Hungarians that night, for the coming battle might decide the fate of Hungary for many a year to come.

Many a group of men might have been seen, with eager faces, discussing the prospects of the morrow, and invoking every sort of malediction upon the foe who had destroyed their towns and villages, and carried off their wives and children for slaves. War with the Turk was a sort of religious war, a crusade in which all were eager to take part.

Near the general's tent, and a little apart from the rest, stood two men, Transylvanian nobles, who

had doubtless also been talking on the same all-engrossing topic; but just now they were silent, and the elder of the two seemed to have fallen into a reverie from which his companion had some difficulty in rousing him. "Come, father," said the young man at length, trying again to lead him away, "it is growing late and the air is cold this evening; you had better go back to your tent."

But the old man would not move, though he roused himself, and the two remained in earnest conversation, lamenting over the fallen greatness of Hungary, and the suffering which had come upon her people.

"One day's victory, and Hungary may yet be saved!" exclaimed Simon. "We still have Hunyadi, and he is the only man who can save us now."

"Ah, glorious Hunyadi! the shield of Christendom! 'God and Hunyadi!' is the cry from every lip. He is our last hope!"

"Yes," continued Simon eagerly; "and the reinforcements are come. The Czechs and the Saxons are in our camp, and many of our nobles have sent their last child to win his laurels on the field of battle under Hunyadi."

"And what is the general feeling in the camp?" asked the old man, in a tone less hopeful than his son's; for old Kemény had watched the gradual fall of his country, and it seemed to him as if there

were now but little chance of saving her. If he could but have died for her, how gladly he would have done so! But he was old and infirm, and neither his life nor his death could do much good.

"There is but one heart in the whole army," answered Simon confidently. "But see! here comes Kereszti, the spy the general sent to the infidels' camp. He will be able to tell us something."

And father and son turned eagerly towards a man in the dress of a Turk, who was coming hastily up to them, asking for Hunyadi.

"Good-evening, my friends! I have run like a hunted hare, as if all the infidels in the Sultan's army were at my heels! But don't stop me: where can I find the general?"

"He is close by. But you have been quick on your errand; tell us what news you bring."

"Bad news, bad news! I'd as soon kiss the dagger which stabs me as tell it."

"It is long since we had good news," said Simon gravely; "but say on: we had better know the worst at once—the greater the need, the greater the strength."

"Well," began Kereszti, "I struggled through the infidel camp in this disguise, exposed every instant to danger, but I escaped; and I heard what orders Mezet Bég has given his men for the coming battle."

The two Keménys, father and son, listened breathlessly, while the spy went on to say that the Turkish vizier, Mezet, had described to his followers the dress and armour always worn by Hunyadi, his weapons and his horse, and had bidden them fight with no one else till he was destroyed. The whole army was to pursue him, and only him, and a royal reward was promised to whoever should succeed in killing him. There were wild cries of joy when the vizier concluded by telling them that Mohammed had prophesied that Hunyadi should fall, and his people be carried captive to Stamboul.

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed old Kemény, as Kereszti finished. "Transylvania, Hungary—all Europe will lose her liberty."

"Mezet is awaiting the Hungarian army in his strong intrenchments at St. Imre, and he is thinking of nothing else but how to plan the destruction of the general."

"Ah!" exclaimed Simon; "pagan that he is, he well knows where to find the soul of the army; and a body without a soul—there is not one among us to be compared with Hunyadi, not one. There is many a man who would cut his way through the enemy's ranks and leave a dead man behind him at every step; but it takes centuries to make such a man as Hunyadi."

Simon paused, and a cloud came over his bright,

eager face as he turned a little aside from his father and Kereszti, and taking no further part in the conversation, seemed to be so entirely buried in his own thoughts as not to hear anything that went on around him. There he stood, playing abstractedly with the jewelled hilt of his sword, while his bright dark eyes were fixed intently on the enemy's camp, and the drooping heron's feather in his scarlet cap waved gently in the evening air. A gallant-looking young soldier was Kemény Simon.

Kereszti, meanwhile, was patiently answering old Kemény's questions as to the numbers of the enemy. There were forty thousand at St. Imre, and ten thousand more daily expected; but this alone would not have discouraged the brave Hungarians, for they were accustomed to fight against superior numbers. Then Kereszti went on to say how confident of success the Turks were; how they boasted of their numbers, and made so sure of victory that already Mezet Bég had appointed his own son governor of Transylvania.

"I could hardly contain myself for rage," he continued, "when I was in the tent of the Basa, for I saw there the head of our reverend bishop. My hand trembled to grasp my dagger, which I kept concealed about me, and involuntarily I half raised my arm. Nothing but the news I had heard could have kept me from bloodshed, but—"

"Thank God, Kereszti, that it was so! You may do more good by your return than by slaying thousands."

They were startled by a sudden exclamation from Simon, who, turning to Kereszti, said earnestly, "You have already done much, but I have still a request to make in the name of our country."

"A word is enough, Simon, for a good patriot: what is it?"

"Keep all that you have seen and heard in the infidel camp secret. I want to turn your news to account."

"Simon, what do you mean?"

"And what will Hunyadi say?"

"He shall be saved!" cried Simon enthusiastically. "Tell no one till I have accomplished my scheme. I will let the general know all that is necessary."

"Well," said Kereszti thoughtfully, "I respect your intentions, whatever they may be, though I don't understand, and I trust you—you love our country. Yes, I will do as you say."

"Thanks! thanks! you shall not be deceived," said Simon, with a strange light in his eyes. "Our suffering country demands a sacrifice, and none but noble blood can quicken it to life. Ah, if my bones may but rest in the land of my ancestors, I have no other earthly wish, Kereszti! Hunyadi will live,

the hated Crescent shall fall, and the pagan host will return to its own valleys."

"I trust you. Now I must haste and change this hateful dress, and get some repose before the battle."

Kereszti departed, and again father and son were alone.

"Well, Simon, I see you have some new hope, some—"

"An inspiration sent from Heaven, father! Look at me! Do you remember how often you have taken me for Hunyadi, and how proudly you have called me his other self? I mean to cheat the Turks. I will borrow the general's armour, and the infidel will not know the difference between Hunyadi and Hunyadi's other self."

"Simon, I cannot," faltered the old man—"my only son!"

"Your son or your country, father? one must perish. Hunyadi's death will enslave our free and noble land; she will be blotted out, and posterity will forget her very existence."

"It is true. Do not heed an old man's sorrow. Go—die for your country," said Kemény tearfully, "and do not look at my tears. I am old, and joy makes me weep when I would smile."

Simon pressed his father's hand in silence, thankful that he at least would not oppose his purpose;

and then his thoughts wandered away to his young wife and his little son, who were both in the camp, and he felt that it was indeed a hard, hard sacrifice. He was not old and worn out, weary of life and its cares; nor was it in any light-minded spirit that he devoted himself to death. Life had been hitherto so bright to him; earth had given him so many blessings, so many hours of joy; his wife and his child were so very dear to him; he had met with so much success; he was so full of buoyant eagerness, so full of hope in the future! Was all this to be quenched for ever? Nay, but this very happiness, all these blessings, surely they demanded from him in return some token of gratitude. Should he shrink back the first time the call came to him?

Old Kemény was the first to break the silence, and he said, with a smile half sorrow and half proud joy, "You are not altered, Simon, from what you were when a boy. I remember, when I came home after a campaign and took you on my knee, how you would look up at me and say, 'Father, you always come back. Some day I shall go away too; but I shall never come back unless I bring a number of Turks with me!' But Hunyadi will never hear of this sacrifice," he added with a sudden gleam of hope.

"Either he must perish or I. If I were equal to him, there might be a question who should have the

glory of dying for his country; but now the course is plain. He is a whole army in himself—the country's chief support; whereas I—my death would only be that of a common soldier. Hunyadi shall not know my scheme till—he is saved."

He broke off suddenly, for he saw his wife coming towards them; and begging his father not to mention the plan in her presence, turned to meet her. Simon may well be pardoned if the sight of his wife and child at that moment half shook his resolution. He could not at least bear to grieve her before the time, her tears would flow soon enough; so they stood there in the twilight talking of their country, while little Lajos watched the gleaming lights of the enemy's camp, and prattled about the "wicked Turks," whom, child that he was, he had already learned to hate. It was hard for Simon to talk without betraying himself, full as his heart was of the one idea; and sometimes he could not help letting slip a word which meant more to his father's ears than to his wife's.

It was a relief when Hunyadi came out of his tent and approached the little group with courteous words of greeting and welcome to Ida, then turning to shake hands with the old man, exclaimed, "What! you here, my friend! Ah! the old lion loves to be among his sons and live his own battles over again in them."

"Ay, ay! This arm once led me also to victory: now I can only bless, not follow, Hunyadi; but the sight of you does me good."

"My lord general," interposed Simon, "Kereszti has returned, but he is gone to rest, and I promised to give you his report." And then he proceeded to tell all that he intended the vajda to hear of what was going on in the Turkish camp. "Mezet Bég," he concluded, "seems to intend to complete his intrenchments before he provokes an attack."

"Ah," said Hunyadi, "want of confidence; so we will begin the battle. We have seen a larger army than his forced to fly; so, generals, we will fill his trenches with our corpses. Let the army be under arms to-night, and you come to a council of war in my tent, that we may arrange the attack."

Hunyadi turned to go, but Simon stopped him, begging for a few words in private.

"Take Ida home, father," he added; "I shall see you again."

Hunyadi signed to the officers who were with him to withdraw; and as soon as he and the young general were alone, he said in his usual kindly manner, "Well, Simon, what is it?"

"It is a small thing in itself, but great to me. Let me represent you in the morrow's fight; let the enemy take me for Hunyadi."

"A strange request truly; what is the reason?"

"Don't ask the reason now. You shall know after the battle. Through my whole life you have been my lode-star, the one whom I have ever striven to resemble, in whom I have found all the virtues which ennoble patriotism. To think that I have ever been Hunyadi—"

"My friend," answered the vajda with emotion, "I fear you have accredited me with the virtues you found in your own breast."

"You call me your friend! In the name of friendship then lend me your arms and your horse to-morrow," cried Simon.

"Is that all?" asked the vajda, wondering. "Kemény, you have always been foremost everywhere, always ready. I am almost ashamed to grant such a trifling request; but since you wish it, come and take all you want, only leave me my sword till after the council. Is there nothing else?"

"Only," said Simon, "if I should happen to fall in this battle, I commend my wife and child to your protection; bring up my son to be a true Magyar."

"Come, come, this is no time for fancies, Kemény. We have been successful hitherto; why should you fear now?"

Why indeed? Simon dared not tell him; but with a bright eye he answered, "'Tis no lack of courage, general." And indeed Hunyadi little needed the assurance.

A few more moments and the young general was alone. The vajda was gone to his tent, and thither Simon was about to follow him; but first he lingered awhile in the evening air, gazing now at the enemy's fires, now at the dark-blue sky above, and as he gazed he thought of the morrow. When next the stars were shining so calmly in the blue heavens, in all human probability his eyes would be closed in death; others might look upon them—others, for whom he had given up all the happiness of life—others, from whose necks he had broken the yoke. But he did not wish to draw back. No; as he stood there alone, he thanked God for having put the thought into his heart, and for having given him strength to act upon it.

"Hunnia, my country, thou wilt give me a last resting-place! and if hereafter, in the distraction of war, the mound which covers my ashes be torn down—if, instead of laurels, thorns only grow upon my grave, yet I shall not be forgotten; Hunnia herself shall be my monument!"

The night wore away in council and preparations, and it was not till nearly dawn that Simon, in the vajda's armour, made his way to his father's room, where he met Kereszti, whom he was anxious to thank. "And," he added aside, that his father might not hear, "if I perish, tell Hunyadi why I borrowed his armour, and thank him for me."

"If I myself survive, which I don't expect," answered Kereszti bluntly. "But hitherto I have always fought at your side, and I shall not quit my post now. I will go with you to the end. What is the order of attack?"

"I lead the attack with the Transylvanians; after which Hunyadi, with the main force, will fall on the enemy's rear in the valley of Ompoly. As soon as he has engaged them, we retreat, and the infidel, taking me for Hunyadi, will pursue us."

"Ha! and a glorious victory Hunyadi the Second will have, could we see it. Well, I'll go and arm."

"Do you see any likeness, father?" asked Simon, smiling, as soon as Kereszti was gone.

"It is Hunyadi's second self—all but the eyes they are not his," answered the old man, looking at his son with fond, proud admiration; and then, as Simon asked him if all were right, proceeding with trembling hands to adjust the helmet, till it was placed as Hunyadi wore it.

The poor old man's hands trembled more and more as he murmured, "My country, forgive me!" and at last, unable to bear it any longer, he fell weeping into his son's arms. But he would not hold him back; and raising himself, he placed his hands on Simon's helmet-covered head, saying solemnly, "My son, thus I bless Hunyadi. My blessing be with thee to the end."

"And now," said Simon, rising from his knees, "let us go to Ida."

Ida was in another part of the tent, not asleep, but watching her sleeping child, and she started up in terror when she saw Hunyadi, as she supposed, before her. It was all Simon could do to convince her that he was not the vajda.

"You see, Ida, there are to be two Hunyadis —one to overthrow the crescent of the Turks, the other to raise the sun of the Magyars. It is a little stratagem."

But Ida shook her head. She had a dim feeling that she was as much deceived as the enemy would be. There was something behind, something more than Simon would say, something which she was not to know, but which assuredly boded no good.

"Simon," she burst forth at length, "you never deceived me before! where am I to look for truth, for pity, if you—"

"Ida, look above. Where the blessed live in eternal day, where no more tears fall from the eyes which gaze on heaven, where the sorrowful sound of sighing is heard no more, where no more earthly change can come—there, in the home of love and truth, my Ida, I shall have thee for ever!"

So spoke Simon, but it was in vain. Was this to be the end of all their happiness? for an end she somehow felt it was. Many a time before he had

been absent from her, many a sleepless, anxious night had she passed, but she had never felt so hopeless then as she did now. Something seemed to tell her that this battle would be his last. She could not, she would not, let him go.

And then Simon spoke again tenderly and sorrowfully, taking her in his arms. "My Ida! can death be sad—death for the fatherland? Would you snatch the wreath from me? No, no; I know you—you will not hold me back. Love gave us to one another, and the same love separates us, Ida, my dearest. I have so much to thank you for. All my happiness on this earth has come to me from you, and it has been very great; but now let us look up to the bright home of better spirits—"

"Simon, I cannot—my thoughts will not go beyond the earth; you are all I want. Ah! what is that?" she exclaimed, as the sudden sound of a trumpet was heard through the stillness.

Lajos too started up, frightened from his sleep, and ran to his mother; and Ida, taking him in her arms, turned again to her husband with a look of mute entreaty. "Tell him not to go, my darling," she whispered to the child; but little Lajos was busy only in admiring the bright armour, and he said innocently, "How splendid you are, father! are you going to fight?—Let him go, mother; he will soon drive away the wicked Turks."

Whereupon Simon snatched him up, and half smothered him with kisses as he said, "Ida, he has spoken truth. It is my duty; for his sake try to be brave, and if—if I should not return—promise me not to waste your life in gloom and sorrow."

A shudder was the only answer; and he added gently, "Ida, my last request," and then with a great struggle Ida promised.

"I will live to train our child to be like his father," she whispered amid her tears.

"Thanks, thanks, my Ida; thanks for all the happy hours, all the joys we have known together. The pain will soon be over, and the joy will be for ever. God be with you," he added, with trembling voice and tearful eyes. "One last kiss. Hark! my country calls me. Ida—my father—my child—God be with you!"

Again the trumpet sounded, and Simon dashed away—dashed from the tent into the clear morning air, to take his post at the head of the Transylvanians. The sun was just rising over the blue mountains when, mounted on Hunyadi's gray charger, with the red banner waving in his hand, Simon rode forth to death.

His division began the attack, and as fast as the Turks were cut down, fresh ones seemed to rise from the ground and take their places. Proudly the Hungarian banners—green, white, and red—

waved in the morning air; but round the blood-red banner the carnage was always fiercest. And now the Transylvanians retreat, and the infidels, with wild shouts of victory, press upon them and pursue them. The Turks, mad with the confidence of victory, leave their own camp far behind, and follow the gray charger as if it had been a lodestone. Closer, closer they throng around it, till, amid a general yell of triumph, the blood-red banner wavers, sinks, and falls for ever.

The field is won! but stay, suddenly the retreating Transylvanians turn on their foe, who, checked in his career, finds himself hemmed in by the Hungarian army, the camp fired in his rear, and Hunyadi, whom he had thought slain, advancing upon him. Thoroughly disheartened at seeing the terrible Hunyadi rise, as it were, from the dead, the Turks fled in confusion; and not long after that day of Kenyérmezö, Amurath made peace with King Vladislav.

As for Kemény Simon's grave, it is in the hearts of his countrymen, among whom his name is still loved and honoured.*

* Founded on the play of "Kemény Simon," by K. Kisfaludy Károly.

THE END.